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Beyond the Grail: The roles of objects as psychological markers in Chrétien de Troyes's *Conte du Graal*

Chrétien de Troyes's *Conte du Graal* has long been considered a *Bildungsroman*. This thesis considers precisely what processes it is that bring about the maturation of Perceval, the hero.

It firstly studies Perceval's initial innocence in the first episode of the romance, his meeting with the five knights. Perceval appears to be preoccupied with surface appearance only, being unable to see beyond it and understand true significances. Medieval theories on childhood development and faculty psychology, derived from sources such as Aristotle and Boethius, help to elucidate this seemingly odd behaviour, for a correlation does indeed emerge between these and Perceval's initial fixation on the superficialities of objects. Perceval begins, it seems, at a developmental stage which, for medieval authorities, would correspond to early childhood. That a key to Perceval's development is indeed signalled via the perception of objects, is then shown via an analysis of three further scenes.

In the Tent scene, Perceval progresses such that he can now not only *perceive* objects, he can also *recall* them and identify familiar objects, such as food. In the Grail Procession, he suddenly becomes able to *judge* the quality of objects within their universal class, though his preoccupation still remains with surface appearance. However, in the Blood Drops scene, Perceval learns to look *beyond* superficiality and recognise *significance*. Thus, Perceval's turning point, we learn, does not occur, as so often suggested, at the Grail Castle. Rather, medieval developmental theories suggest that ultimate maturity must occur when he, for the first time, acknowledges more than mere superficiality: when he sees the blood drops and understands their higher significance. This equips Perceval with the perceptual tools he requires to understand the Hermit's lesson and presumably, had Chrétien finished the romance, look *beyond the Grail*, understand its meaning and achieve the task.

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Introduction

'Le *Bildungsroman* n'est [...] qu'une sorte de préroman, de préambule. En fait, à la fin de l'oeuvre le héros nous apparaît armé pour l'existence, prêt à vivre son roman.'¹

Chrétien de Troyes, "writer of psychological romances"², should perhaps more precisely be known as the gifted creator of *Bildungsromane*³. It is true that Chrétien never states it as his particular intention to produce stories that map the progression of a young man's life, but it is difficult to refute the suggestion that his principal characters seem to be assigned particular narrative and developmental patterns, to which they strongly adhere. More importantly though, with the idea of 'the crisis'⁴ being prevalent in Chrétien's romances, it is also undeniable that Chrétien's characters develop both emotionally and morally⁵ *within themselves*, as the crisis *must* be followed by a personal renewal, whereby the hero is reborn morally and

¹ François Jost, 'La Tradition du *Bildungsroman*', *Comparative Literature*, 21 (1969), 97-115 (p. 99).

² Joseph J. Duggan, *The Romances of Chrétien de Troyes* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 180.

³ A *Bildungsroman* is officially described as 'a novel dealing with one person's formative years or spiritual development' (*The New Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. by Judy Pearsall (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 172). The German term *Bildung* means education or formation; however it is commonly misunderstood to mean solely 'education' in the formal, scholastic sense- a more accurate term for education alone would actually be *Ausbildung*. As it is missing the vital prefix 'Aus', what *Bildung* actually refers to, therefore, is a rather more general form of education, be it psychological, mental, physical (though not as often), or spiritual. It is the definition of psychological development that I believe to be most crucial to the *Conte* as, in many ways, it not only encompasses the other definitions, but as we shall see, also best describes the kind of development we are witness to. For further affirmation of Chrétien as the writer of *Bildungsromane*, see, amongst many other examples, Jean Frappier, 'Perceval or *Le Conte du Graal*', trans. by Raymond Cormier, in *The Grail: A Casebook*, ed. by Dhira B. Mahoney (New York and London: Garland, 2000), pp. 175-200 (p. 178); Norris J. Lacy, *The Craft of Chrétien de Troyes: An Essay on Narrative Art* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1980), p. 100; Karl D. Uitti and Michelle A. Freeman, *Chrétien de Troyes Revisited* (New York: Twayne, 1995), p. 125; Debora B. Schwartz, "'A la guise de Gales l'atorna": Maternal Influence in Chrétien's *Conte du Graal*' *Essays in Medieval Studies*, 15 (1995), <<http://www.luc.edu/publications/medieval/vol12/schwartz.html>> [accessed 3 February 2004], (para. 1 of 62).

⁴ The crisis is the dividing line between the 'before' and 'after', 'whereby the character realizes his failing and sets out to repair it', Lacy, p. 1.

⁵ Lacy, p. 28.

psychologically in order to counteract the effects of that crisis.⁶ Thus whilst Chrétien never says that character development is his focus, we may measure growing maturity *narratively* through the actions and reactions of his characters. Interestingly though, Chrétien reserves this focus on *Bildung* or education solely for the presentation of the *primary* characters in his romances, characters driven by ambition, pride and a concern for reputation. Lacy asserts that:

‘[T]he hero moves as a larger-than-life figure in a world where objects and persons come into focus when they come into contact with him, where nothing happens which is not related to him.’⁷

Thus, we are aware of the importance attached to the maturing hero: without him, neither person nor object makes sense. He is the centre of everything; the focus of the romance. And whilst it is possible to argue that *all* of Chrétien’s principal characters develop in their own way, what we are particularly concerned with is the progression from some kind of immaturity to an ultimate maturity, and only three of his characters are actually depicted as clearly evolving and developing towards this ultimate maturity⁸: they are Yvain, Erec and Perceval.⁹ My ultimate focus will be Perceval, but in order to set the scene, I shall start with a brief overview of *Erec et Enide* and *Yvain*. Let us look, then, at immaturity as it is portrayed in these three corresponding romances. Is it conveyed in similar ways or is there a fundamental difference in its depiction, such that we might take away a different understanding of its meaning?

So to begin with *Erec et Enide*, the study of how a knight, once married, may sustain the valour and glory that first won him a bride. Erec, the principal character, is a knight already well established within the Arthurian court. We hear lengthy descriptions of how wonderful and worthy a knight he is. He is most handsome and

⁶ Ibid, p. 27.

⁷ Lacy, p. 29.

⁸ Duggan, p. 181.

⁹ *Lancelot* and *Cligés* are slightly different cases. Lancelot, despite all of the well-intentioned actions he commits to redeem the sin he is guilty of in the romance, is nevertheless an adulterer. This is something he can never escape, thus he is never truly able to redeem himself from his ultimate wrong. Cligés never really has a crisis as such. The romance is more of a *Romeo and Juliet* style love story, whereby Cligés always was and always will be noble in all senses. His adultery is never viewed in a particularly sinful light.

noble, well versed and established in knightly combat. Indeed we are even informed that he is particularly finely dressed:

De la Table Reonde estoit,
Mout grant los an la cort avoit.
De tant come il i ot esté,
N'i ot chevalier plus loé;
Et fu tant biaux, qu'an nule terre
N'esteüst plus bel de lui querre.
Mout estoit biaux et preuz et janz,
Et n'avoit pas vint et cinc anz.
Onques nus hon de son age
Ne fu de greignor vasselage.
Que diroie de ses bontez?
Sor un cheval estoit montez,
Afublez d'un mantel ermin
Galopant vint tot le chemin,
S'ot cote d'un diaspre noble,
Qui fu fez an Costantinoble. (vv. 83-98)¹⁰

And it is not the narrator alone who recognises his worthiness- everyone with whom he comes into contact also considers him the finest knight; for example, even Arthur himself favours Erec above all other knights (except for his nephew Gauvain):

Car n'avoit an tote sa cort
Mellor chevalier ne plus preu
Fors Gauvain, son tres chier neveu; (vv. 2286-88)

Enide's father, too, who has long sought a worthy enough suitor for his daughter, agrees that Enide could not find a better match:

"Bien avomes oï
De vos parler an cest païs.
Or vos aim assez plus et pris,
Car mout estes preuz et hardiz.
Ja de moi n'iroiz escondiz:
Tot a vostre comandement
Ma bele fille vos present." (vv. 670-76)

We, the audience are left in no doubt as to Erec's almost hyperbolic perfection. However, a crisis ensues after Erec has won the tourney of the Sparrow Hawk. He takes Enide to Arthur's court where they are married. He is so deeply in love with her that he begins to neglect his courtly duties, preferring instead to spend his time enjoying his love's company. This self-indulgence is Erec's great downfall, as he

¹⁰ Textual references are made to Chrétien de Troyes, *Erec et Enide* (Paris: Champion, 1952).

effectively rejects the society that had welcomed him and his wife with 'Joy', thus his peers and other knights begin to talk about the shame of such a worthy knight as Erec becoming too engrossed in marriage. Enide, one day, overhears the malicious talk and eventually summons up the courage to tell her husband about what she has heard (vv. 2544-48). Immediately he decides to leave the court in search of chivalric adventure (vv. 2574-79). So begins Erec's path to redemption and to his new self. The sort of immaturity that we see in Erec, however, is not that of churlishness and ignorance, rather it is a kind of self-absorbed, indifferent nature, whereby he cannot get the balance of love and courtly prowess right. We first notice a clear step away from this selfishness in Erec's development when he is defeated by Guivret and accepts his humiliation maturely (vv. 5090-92). He suddenly seems to realise that one should not approach combat for selfish reasons- favouring disciplined thought and rational behaviour over mindless self-interest and its attendant violence. It is the *Joie de la Cour* episode, however, that embodies all that Erec must embrace if he is to be redeemed. Where previously Erec's self-indulgence with his wife had taken away the Joy of the Court that had been so prolific when he first arrived with Enide, Erec now takes his chance to return this 'Joy' to the Court by not allowing his love to completely restrain his knightly prowess. Rather he finally understands that love should *inspire* prowess. Love and prowess must both, therefore, be selfless,¹¹ and it is this realisation that enables him to be successful in the task.

So, as we can clearly see, Erec does indeed develop, and the romance certainly deserves its description as a *Bildungsroman*, but the progression is not one from adolescent immaturity to a form of adulthood- rather it demonstrates a kind of *chivalric* progression to a form of *courtly* maturity, which is embodied by the pursuit of Joy. Put another way, courtly maturity means coming to the gradual understanding that Joy should be lasting and productive, not selfish and ephemeral. And the attaining of this courtly maturity is underlined by the fact that Erec is subsequently crowned as king, once again esteemed and respected by all.

¹¹ L. T. Topsfield, *Chrétien de Troyes: A Study of the Arthurian Romances* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 38.

So to *Yvain* or *Le Chevalier au Lion*, a romance which examines much the same conflict of love and chivalry as does *Erec et Enide*, although this time the main character, Yvain, is a character who, contrary to Erec, cannot spend as much time on his love as he does on his chivalric adventures. Where he is similar to Erec is in his initial status as a knight of renown, well esteemed and well established within Arthur's court. He is, perhaps, a little impetuous, but he is in no way the foolish braggart that Kay suggests (vv. 588-609)¹². He proves his worth in his defeat of the Knight of the Fountain (vv. 853-70) and through his winning of Laudine as his bride (vv. 1982-2048). It seems he has everything, but then Gauvain reminds him of his chivalric duties and the importance of adventure, which he, Gauvain, places above his love for a lady:

Amender doit de bele dame
 Qui l'a a amie où a fenme,
 Ne n'est puis drois que ele l'aint
 Que ses près et ses los remaint.
 Chertes, encore serois iriés
 De s'amor, se vous empiriés;
 Que fenme a tost s'amor reprise,
 Ne n'a pas tort, s'ele desprise
 Chelui qui devient de l'empire
 Sire qui pour s'amour empire.
 Primes en doit vostre pris croistre.
 Rompés le frain et le chavestre,
 S'irons tournoier avec vous,
 Que on ne vous apiaut jalous. (vv. 2489-502)

Thus, he requests leave of his lady, who grants it, but only for a set period after which he must return if he is not to incite her hatred (vv. 2562-77). He becomes caught up in the succession of tourneys at which he fights, quite neglects the words of his lady and does not return to her within the set period; Gauvain does not want him to leave as he wishes the many tourney successes to continue. This neglect for his wife's wishes is Yvain's downfall. What he displays in this is a lack of moral courage¹³ to stand up for himself and take his leave from Gauvain; it is precisely this lack of moral courage that constitutes Yvain's immaturity. Thus, as with Erec, what we have here is not a childish, adolescent immaturity; rather, Yvain's immaturity is

¹² Textual references are to Chrétien de Troyes, *Le Chevalier au Lion*,

<<http://www.ifrance.com/EGB/Textes/chevalier%20au%20lion.htm>> [accessed 30 August 2004].

¹³ Topsfield, p. 178.

one particular flaw in his character that must be rectified before he can redeem himself.

He subsequently becomes something of a wildman, living alone, hermit-like, in the forest, but he eventually finds the path back to renown through unselfish knightly deeds. One day, he comes across a lion and a dragon fighting (vv. 3336-57). He chooses to help the lion, thus metaphorically choosing nobility of mind over perfidy¹⁴. The lion is representative of the new self that Yvain must adopt if he is to develop from a fragmented to a whole person, as it possesses the virtue of moral courage that Yvain lacks. Through the lion he can be reborn with a new name and identity as the Knight of the Lion- an ideal of both knighthood and love. The lion actually is, metaphorically, that virtue that Yvain is lacking; it represents the moral courage that he needs to complete himself. This once again emphasises the delicate balance that must be sustained between matters of the heart and chivalry if one is to achieve happiness, prowess and renown.

With these two romances, Chrétien provides us with paragons of knighthood in Erec and Yvain, both noble and adept. Chivalric success is obviously of great importance in their lives, *but*, we learn, this alone is not enough. Both knights must also be able to lead intelligent relationships with their wives as well. Thus, we see both knights develop with regard to their understanding of how they must *balance* their lives. They are not immature in the traditional sense of the word, but they do lack a vital knowledge and virtue which would allow them *both* chivalric *and* emotional maturity in life. Chivalric success is evidently only the starting point.

So we come to *Perceval* or *Le Conte du Graal*, a romance which works very differently. Where before we have learnt that chivalric prowess is a mere part of the whole of what success entails, here Chrétien seeks to complicate and even undermine the importance of chivalry. Perceval begins life as a sort of *tabula rasa*. He is a character with no apparent connections to the Arthurian court. He is ignorant, sheltered, churlish and naïve, displaying a very different kind of immaturity to that

¹⁴ Topsfield, p. 189.

which we have seen with Erec and Yvain. Chrétien immediately draws his audience's attention, firmly, to a character who is something of an unlikely hero. Where before we have been used to wondrous knights having a particular flaw that leads to a downfall and a subsequent redemption, here we have a character who is, in many ways, a fundamental flaw in himself. What I mean here is that he could actually be seen as being a flaw in the composition of the story itself, as he seems to be entirely the opposite of the sort of character who would usually take on the hero's role in one of Chrétien's romances.

Perceval, then, perhaps even more so than the other romances, is a *Bildungsroman*.¹⁵ It describes an undeniably clear process of maturation in its main character, but precisely *how* it does this is often in debate.¹⁶ *Perceval* begins as nothing, but develops and attains, very quickly, knightly prowess through acts of courtly combat. He becomes renowned as a skilled knight in Arthur's court, despite the fact that his identity long remains unknown. Indeed, just as Yvain's self is reborn with the addition of a new name, *Perceval*, too, attains something of a new identity through the learning of his name. He also achieves a lady in Blanchefleur, and thus seems to have all of the elements required for chivalric maturity to be his, especially as no particular complications ever arise for *Perceval* (as they do for Erec and Yvain) regarding his ability to balance this love with his knightly duties. However, Chrétien then undermines his previous assertions of what it takes to achieve success. In the *Conte*, it appears that emotional and chivalric maturity are simply not enough. There is another virtue that one must have, and that is the ability to recognise significance

¹⁵ For further affirmation that we can read it thus, see Alex Micha, 'Le *Perceval* de Chrétien de Troyes' in *Lumière du Graal*, ed. by René Nelli (Paris: Cahiers du Sud, 1951), pp. 122-31, who describes the *Conte* as a *roman de l'initiation* (p. 122) and suggests that 'le roman propose une triple formation: à la chevalerie, à l'amour, à la religion' (p. 122). Penny Simons, too, discusses Chrétien's primary interest in the education and development of the main character in her 'Pattern and Process of Education in *Le Conte du Graal*', *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 32 (1988), 1-11, as does Madeleine Pelner Cosman who considers that the 'education of the hero is significant for the hero's characterisation and for the structure of the romances' (Chapter II: 'The Education of *Perceval*: A Brave Man Slowly Wise', in *The Education of the Hero in Arthurian Romance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), pp. 49-100 (p. 50)). See also Frappier, p. 178; Lacy, p. 100; Schwartz, (para. 1 of 62).

¹⁶ Some look to the introduction of various mentors to explain this phenomenon- for references, see note 18 below. Others, such as Lacy and Frappier, tend to look to narrative techniques, such as symbolism, to help elucidate this complex topic.

and to act appropriately upon it, or more accurately, to *perceive* and *understand*. At the Grail Castle, Perceval is unable to achieve his task as he cannot *perceive* beyond surface appearance and *understand* the true significance of the objects¹⁷ he encounters. This inability leads to his ultimate downfall, and because the story remains unfinished (for reasons which are still uncertain¹⁸), we never actually see the completion of his redemption.

It is because *Perceval*, as a *Bildungsroman*, differs so notably from *Yvain* and *Erec et Enide* that I have chosen to concentrate on it. *Perceval*, I shall suggest, represents a new departure: Chrétien de Troyes, for the first time, suggests that chivalric and courtly excellence, as it is understood in these latter two romances, is not a sufficient index of maturity. Whether by accident or design- we must recognise that the fact that the romance is unfinished makes final judgments difficult- what we see at our last meeting with Perceval shows that the romance conforms usefully to the remarks from Jost that I quoted at the beginning of this introduction (p. 5): Perceval is indeed *only now* about to succeed. It is this that justifies choosing the *Conte* for examination rather than *Erec* or *Yvain*. But my focus is not on that process itself; rather, it is on the tools that Chrétien uses, narratively speaking, to track Perceval's maturity and demonstrate it for his readers. What I want to suggest is that Chrétien lends Perceval a particular set of perceptions and a particular series of events in which those perceptions are obvious- and that it is these events, these scenes, and Perceval's

¹⁷ It is no secret that objects and symbols were often regarded as important and meaningful in the Middle Ages, and indeed their supposed meanings were often of religious import: words such as 'light', 'king', 'fire' and 'name', for example, would be almost immediately recognised as having spiritual connotations (see M-D. Chenu, *La Théologie au douzième siècle* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1987), p. 168). However, this is something of an Aristotelian concept (Chenu, p. 162), which in turn gave way to the «*symbole*» *dionysien*, which relates all objects to the 'vocabulaire pastoral et doctrinal de l'Église' (Chenu, p. 176). There was, however, another school of thought which considered objects to have a much wider range of meanings. Known as that of the «*signe*» *augustinien*, the theory held that the meanings of objects derived from a *psychologie de la connaissance* which understood objects simply by mental and memorial means, rather than by spiritual- that is, the understanding or interpretation of an object depends upon one's prior knowledge and experience (Chenu, p. 176).

¹⁸ Some maintain that Chrétien simply died before he could complete the romance, others think it may have been the death of Chrétien's patron, Philippe of Flanders, that stopped Chrétien from finishing it. There is also the suggestion that Chrétien, much as he did with *Lancelot*, was not entirely pleased with how the romance had turned out and so chose to leave it unfinished, though this is often considered perhaps too speculative, thus either of the two former theories is thought more likely.

perception of them that encapsulate his progress and allow the audience or the modern reader to comprehend it. I do not, of course underestimate the effects on him of the mentors to whom he is exposed- his mother, Gornemant, even Blanchefleur or his cousin¹⁹. But what crystallises his development, what makes it dramatic for his readers, is, I shall suggest, the ways in which Perceval meets, perceives, reacts to and interiorises objects.²⁰ Somehow it seems that Perceval's development is something which arises from his self- it is not, as is so commonly held, something that arises from what he is told.

I have chosen therefore to concentrate my analysis on four scenes from the romance: Perceval's first meeting with chivalry in the form of five knights errant; his first foray into the world outside the forest, with the Damsel in the Tent; his experience of the Grail and the Grail procession and the scene in which he is lost in meditation on the three drops of blood on the snow. These are, I shall suggest, pivotal, and pivotal precisely because they show Perceval's growing maturity and growing ability to relate to objects beyond himself and to understand their significance. The last of these four scenes, I shall suggest, is crucial in that, for the first time, Perceval relates an object not just to his own curiosity, or his own needs, or his own perceptions, but to someone else; in other words, he becomes able to relate the physical object to its significance. This is, I shall propose, the crucial moment- the

¹⁹ Critics have often tended to cite these mentors as key points by which one may track Perceval's development; see, amongst others, Keith Busby, who cites the advice of Perceval's mother, Gornemant and the Hermit as key turning points in Perceval's development in his *Chrétien de Troyes: 'Perceval' ('Le Conte du Graal')* (London: Grant & Cutler, 1993); Brigitte Cazelles concentrates on the differences between the Arthurian and non-Arthurian acculturations of Perceval as the key to his development in her *The Unholy Grail: A Social Reading of Chrétien de Troyes's 'Conte du Graal'* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), esp. p. 134; Rupert T. Pickens suggests that three episodes 'are [...] three points on the same axis' and these are his encounters with his mother, the Roi Pêcheur and the Hermit. He is saying that these constitute very similar turning points in Perceval's progression, see his *The Welsh Knight: Paradoxicality in Chrétien's 'Conte del Graal'* (Lexington, KY: French Forum, 1977), p. 50; Donald Maddox makes a slightly different assertion in suggesting that Perceval's various encounters with his 'mentors' cause 'awakenings' in Perceval. That is, after an encounter, he sleeps and then awakes with a slightly different outlook on life, see his 'The Awakening: A Key Motif in Chrétien's Romances', in *The Sower and his Seed: Essays on Chrétien de Troyes*, ed. by Rupert T. Pickens (Lexington, KY: French Forum, 1983), pp. 31-51 (pp. 39-40).

²⁰ Lacy has noted that Perceval's encounters with objects do seem to spark certain transitions in his development, pp. 16-17.

moment that will make Perceval receptive to the lesson that the Hermit will give him (vv. 6331-520), and which prepares him, we cannot but feel, for success in the final adventure, the achieving of the Grail.

But to commence our investigation into the idea that the perception of objects may be the device by which it is possible map Perceval's personal development, we must begin at the beginning, with a scene where we see Perceval in the very early stages of his maturation, entirely naïve and ignorant of all which awaits him.

Chapter 1:

The Knights' Armour

(vv. 69-363)

After Chrétien's preamble, we find ourselves in a beautiful spring setting, as is so often the case at the beginning of medieval romances.²¹ It is a scene surrounded by the work of nature, illustrated by a range of *topoi* which emphasise sensual experience:

....arbre florissent,
Fuellent boschage, pré verdissent
Et cil oisel an lor latin
Doucement chantent au matin
Et tote riens de joie anflame... (vv. 69-73)²²

It is then that we meet 'li filz a la veve dame/ De la gaste forest' (vv. 74-75). This seems an odd way to introduce the first character we meet, as whilst it is quite a precise way of defining the character (by way of his relationship to his mother), it tells us nothing of how this boy looks, nor what age or of what class he is, and as the scene develops, this oddity becomes more pronounced. He is, evidently, old enough to venture out on his own, as he immediately saddles up his palfrey, takes up three javelins and sets out to see his mother's harrows:

....et ne li fu painne
Que il sa sele ne meist
Sor son chaceor et preïst
Trois javeloz, et tot eini
Fors del manoir sa mere avoit,
Qui ses aviaïnes li herçoient:
Bués doze et sis herces avoient; (vv. 76-84)

One might note here, in passing, that Chrétien pays particular attention to the numbers of things, even though this information seems superfluous at present to what we actually need to know. For example, the boy takes *three* javelins and the harrows have *twelve* oxen and *six* harrows. So, if this is of no importance to the

²¹ See Ernst Robert Curtius, 'The Ideal Landscape' in *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953), pp. 183-202.

²² All textual references are to Chrétien de Troyes, *Perceval ou le Conte du graal*, bilingual edition, trans. by Jean Dufournet (Paris: Flammarion, 1997).

audience, then to whom is it useful? The only other person present is the boy, so we must assume that in some way it is significant for him, even though at this stage, there may be no fathomable explanation.

Chrétien moves on to describe quite explicitly the sorts of things which seem to give this character pleasure:

Einsi an la forest s'an antre.
Et maintenant li cuers del vandre
Por le douz tans li resjoï
Et por le chant que il oï
Des oisiaus qui joie feisoient:
Totes cez choses li pleisoient. (vv. 85-90, my emphasis)

These are all things which appeal to the senses, in particular those of hearing and touch. Indeed, Chrétien provides us with a kind of lexicon of sensual pleasure, which is followed, in line 90, by an absolute insistence on the fact that this is what the character enjoys. We can see the extent of this enjoyment in lines 86-87: 'li cuers del vandre/ Por le douz tans le resjoï...' So, it can be seen that his joy is such that it actually produces an internalised, physical reaction in the boy.²³ Thus, we have the feeling that this scene is more than just the standard *reverdie*, as not only is the boy's reaction an internally physical one, he also displays a blatant exterior show of joy in response to the pleasant weather and the surge of sensual gratifications:

Por la douçor del tans serain
Osta au chaceor son frain,
Si le leissa aler peissant
Par l'erbe fresche verdeant.
Et cil qui bien lancier savoit
Des javeloz que il avoit,
Aloit environ lui lançant
Une ore arriere et autre avant,
Une ore an bas et autre an haut... (vv. 95-99)

²³ From this we might be reminded of the modern phrase 'avoir de coeur au ventre', meaning 'to be brave', which indicates at least the profundity of the emotion. In Tobler-Lommatzsch, *Altfranzösisches Wörterbuch*, 11 vols (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1952-), II, 1111-20, (hereafter to be referred to as 'T-L') the phrase is directly associated with love at its most intense level ('Herz im Liebe'), but it is the modern French translation in our bilingual edition of the text that gives the best impression of what the phrase actually signifies: 'son coeur, au plus profond de lui-même, fut transporté de bonheur' (p. 43). This is a heart that seems to reside considerably deeper than the actual bodily organ, a sort of metaphorical heart. Importantly, as we shall see, the heart was widely considered responsible for and receptive to certain perceptions (cf. p. 52), and it is this heart that is 'beside itself with joy', thus reiterating how extensive the *vaslez*'s receptiveness to sensory gratifications is.

He begins a seemingly *purposeless* game of launching javelins all about, rather as if he is playing. The couplet in lines 98 and 99 emphasises the randomness of the game, as the anaphoric structure of the lines gives us a sense of arbitrariness. In his own mind, the boy must have an idea of what he is trying to achieve, but the ends of both lines show that, at least to the audience, he is in fact quite literally throwing javelins *randomly*, and indeed, purposelessly. In the space of thirty lines, Chrétien makes us aware of three major aspects of the character before us, creating a kind of rough outline sketch of the boy: 1. He enjoys the gratification of the senses, 2. He plays purposeless games for no other reason than for his own pleasure and 3. He is defined only as his mother's son: 'li filz a la veve dame' (v. 74).

The boy is only distracted from his 'game' when an immense din from within the forest disturbs him: 'Tant qu'il oï parmi le gaut/ Venir cinc chevaliers armez,' (vv. 100-01). It is worth noting that Chrétien tells the audience, and *only* the audience, that the noise belongs to a group of knights who are approaching, but Perceval, of course, cannot know that it is "five knights", as he has not yet seen who or what is making the noise. In addition, the precise description of which knightly objects are responsible for making which noises cannot be for anyone else's information other than the audience's:

Et mout grant *noise* demenoient
 Les armes de çaus qui venoient;
 Car souvent *hurtoient* as armes
 Li rain des chasnes et des charmes.
 Les lances as escuz *hurtoient*,
 Et tuit li hauberc *fremilloient*;
 Sonoit li fuz, *sonoit* li fers
 Et des escuz et des haubers. (vv. 103-10, my emphasis)

And since this description is for the audience's benefit, its purpose must be to make us privileged observers of the scene we are about to experience. We might also notice that Chrétien has created yet another sensual lexicon, this time related to sound, the insistence on which constitutes a rather over-determined semantic field, again drawing our attention to the fact that this boy seems attracted to gratifications of a sensual nature. Lacy notes that this emphasis on sound is narratively helpful, so that we can understand the irony that is to come:

[I]f we had experienced through his consciousness the terrifying noises in his mother's forest, we would not find it at all strange that he thinks devils are approaching. His reaction may be naïve, but it is comical only because Chrétien has told us that Perceval heard 'five knights' approaching²⁴.

That the boy does not initially *see* the knights is confirmed by lines 111-12: 'Li vaslez ot et ne voit pas/ Çaus qui vienent plus que le pas.' Here, therefore, we are firmly in the realm of *hearing*, but even if the boy had seen the knights making the clatter, he would have been no wiser to their identity, as he has apparently never actually seen a knight before anyway. Upon hearing the noises, he assumes:

«Par m'ame,
Voir me dist ma mere, ma dame,
Qui me dist que deable sont
Plus esfrée que riens del mont,...» (vv. 113-16)

Thus, we see he is forced to make assumptions based on the advice he does have to hand, namely the words of his mother. It also gives us a picture of his dependence, as it appears that his mother is his major, or even sole, informant. This is a highly comic device, as the 'sophisticated' reader recognises immediately the lack of sophistication inherent in the character in his having relied on his mother's advice to interpret the noises, only to continue by scorning her advice to cross himself:

«...Et se dist por moi anseigner
Que por aus se doit an seigner;
Mes cest anseing desdeigneraï,
Que ja voir ne m'an seigneraï,...» (vv. 117-20)

Here, Chrétien repeats a *rime riche* by using rhyming cognates ending in 'eigner/ai', creating a clearly homophonic rhyme, which further underlines the boy's seemingly dislocated sense of logic in making decisions. He evidently listens to what his mother says, but takes from it only the parts he wants to. Thus far, the characteristics displayed have worked together to depict, in the first instance, ignorance; on second glance, we come to recognise the features belonging to youth, such as playfulness and the rejection of parental advice. Debora B. Schwartz describes this rejection and concomitant recognition of the mother quite concisely:

²⁴ Lacy, p. 61.

[T]he issue of maternal influence is thus more complicated than it initially appears. While the first step in Perceval's trajectory toward knighthood is a rejection of the mother who had attempted to shield him from it, the boy is cognizant of the fact that her teachings may well be true, even as he ignores them.²⁵

Whilst this may be true, it is perhaps more interesting to consider what he decides to do *instead* of heeding his mother's advice, and that is to revert to a sort of petulant violence, as he assumes that, by these means, he will be able to overcome the 'devils':

«...Einz ferrai si tot le plus fort
D'un des javeloz que je port,
Que ja n'approchera vers moi
Nus des autres, si con je croi.» (vv. 121-24)

This immediately draws our attention to the fact that he not only has no comprehension of what knights signify (with regard to the chivalric code etc.), but that he also has no grasp of the fact that, were they in fact devils, he would have absolutely no power to overcome them by means of violence. Topsfield notes that:

Perceval's innate aggression and violence is kindled by this warlike uproar. [...] He does not cross himself, as [his mother] bade him do. His instinct is to fight.²⁶

Perceval's ignorant and rather violent reaction to what he has *heard* is then contradicted entirely by what he next *sees*. His first glimpse of the knights fills him with wonderment; he is, it seems, drawn to the light and bright colours emanating from them:

Mes quant il les vit an apert
Que del bois furent descovert,
Et vit les haubers fremianz
Et les hiaumes clers et luisanz
Et les lances et les escuz
Que onques mes n'avoit veüz,
Et vit le vert et le vermoil
Reluire contre le soloil
Et l'or et l'azur et l'arjant,
Si li fu mout et bel et jant,
Et dist: «Ha! sire Deus, merci!
Ce sont ange que je voi ci...» (vv. 127-38)

Chrétien begins in lines 129-30 by describing the shining nature of the armour. He

²⁵ Schwartz, (para. 23 of 62).

²⁶ Topsfield, p. 226.

uses the words *fremianz*²⁷, *cler*²⁸ and *luisanz*²⁹, which are all words considered to have strong connections with descriptions of armour and arms- and interestingly, *fremianz* and *luisanz* are usually used almost exclusively to mean glittering or shining with specifically those arms that Chrétien suggests- plus, of course, he places them at the rhyme, emphasising yet further their importance. To a medieval audience, the use of these words would have been entirely familiar in the context that Chrétien is suggesting, and so they may well have questioned why the boy is so taken aback at so familiar a sight. To further affirm this point, in lines 133-35, Chrétien continues by describing the colours that the boy sees: colours often associated with knighthood. In particular, *vert* and *vermoil* are often associated with heraldry³⁰, as are gold and silver³¹. So, one can state without doubt that this passage would have inspired no particular reactions of surprise in the audience, as the adjectives used are completely in keeping with the context in which Chrétien places them. This being the case, what would actually have been disconcerting for the audience would have been the *boy's reaction* to this outwardly rather normal scene.

He is inexplicably drawn to the armour rather like a child to pretty, shiny objects. In line 136, he makes the strange assumption that 'Ce sont ange que je voi ci'. We find out next that this assumption is in fact grounded on what his mother has told him:

Ne me dist ma mere fable,
 Qui me dist que li ange estoient
 Les plus *bele* choses qui soient, (vv. 142-44, my emphasis)

We know now that the boy believes beauty to be something which is shiny and colourful, as he describes the sparkling, gleaming knights as *bel* in line 136. He also recalls that angels are *bele choses* (v. 144) because his mother has told him they are.

²⁷ 'fremianz', from 'formillier'= *schimmern*- to gleam or to shimmer. Used almost exclusively with hauberks, T-L, III, 2120. See also 'fremillon'=brillant/bruisant in Frédéric Godefroy, *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française et de tous ses dialectes du IX^e au XV^e siècle*, 10 vols (Paris : Vieweg, 1881-1902), IV, p. 136.

²⁸ 'cler'= (in conjunction with arms) *glänzend* (shining, shimmering) in T-L, II, 473. See also 'cler'= *brillant* in Godefroy, II, pp. 150-51.

²⁹ 'luisanz' from 'luisir'= *leuchten* (to glitter or sparkle) specifically associated with helmets- in T-L, V, 714. See also 'luisanz' from 'luisir'= *luire/briller*, often shown with word *hiau*, Godefroy, V, p. 50.

³⁰ 'vert': T-L, XI, 325; see also Godefroy, VIII, p. 208; 'vermoil'= 'als Farbe in Wappen des Schildes, als Gesichtsfarbe und als Farbe des Blutes', T-L, XI, 287-91, Godefroy, VIII, p. 195.

³¹ 'or': T-L, VI, 1160. 'arjant' from 'argent', 'oft in der Heraldik', T-L, I, 520.

Thus his logic tells him that, if the beings in front of him are *bel*, they therefore must be angels. In fact Chrétien continues to insist on this lexeme when the *vaslez* presumes, on the grounds of this assumption, that the most beautiful of the knights must actually be God Himself, as only He can surpass the beauty of angels:

For Deu qui est plus *biaus* que tuit.
 Ci voi je Damedeu, ce cuit,
 Car un si *bel* an i esgart
 Que li autre, se Deus me gart,
 N'ont mie de *biauté* le disme. (vv. 145-49, my emphasis)

Chrétien includes no defining characteristics as to precisely what makes this knight more beautiful than the others, though one might expect it to have something to do with his shiny armour, as this is what leads the *vaslez* to his previous conclusions. Perhaps the knight is standing in more direct sunlight than the others, or is more richly adorned. Either way, his beauty leads the *vaslez* to the conclusion that this is God standing before him. Lacy explains the *vaslez*'s religious take on these objects by suggesting that religion is the only education that the boy has received, and so, he reverts to it to provide himself with an answer to that which he sees before him:

[H]e is confronted by situations which would normally require a worldly and cultivated response. He however knows nothing of the world, and his limited understanding leads him to imprint on all these situations a religious interpretation.³²

This is almost certainly true, but one must consider additionally that he does not fully comprehend the significance of religion, other than that he must love and worship God³³, because his mother, as his only informant, has told him he must:

«...Et si dist ma mere meisme
 Qu'an doit Deu croire et aorer
 Et sozplioier et enorer:
 Et je aorerai cestui
 Et toz les autres avuec lui.» (vv. 150-54)

To him, it does not appear that religion has any particular meaning, only that it is something he must abide by. As far as he is concerned:

Gods and the devils, angels and knights live on the same plane of material appearance and are judged by their outward beauty and splendour.³⁴

³² Lacy, p. 101.

³³ 'aorer' (lines 151 and 153)= *anbeten* (to adore and worship-specifically God), T-L, I, 412.

This continued insistence on the *vaslez*'s preoccupation with 'outward beauty' or surface appearance is engendered in the repetition of the word *bel*, which contradicts what his mother may well have meant when she described angels as *bele choses*, as it is entirely possible that she may have meant interior beauty conveyed by deeds or actions³⁵, rather than the superficial world that her son is limited to.

With this in mind, we may now begin to take notice of a certain active 'miseducation' present in the hero's character. It is clear that his mother has made an effort to educate her son, but nevertheless, certain important aspects are lacking from his education, which would make him better prepared for the outside world. At this point in the text, we are not specifically told that his mother has deliberately neglected to tell him about certain aspects of life, but we can certainly infer, due to the evidence I have so far presented, that he is unusually ignorant, particularly of chivalric and religious traditions, and would most certainly have appeared so to a medieval audience. So we cannot help but wonder what the explanation is for the fact that the boy is not in any way cognisant of the beings before him. Has something- his mother, or his seclusion in the *gaste forest*- purposefully sheltered him from the outside world?

By way of illustrating just how unusual the *vaslez*'s behaviour is, Chrétien offers us a glimpse of the knights' perception of the *vaslez* before them. Whilst we know that the *vaslez*'s reason for throwing himself to the ground in front of the knights is to worship them, as he believes them angels, the knights do not expect this to be the case:

Maintenant vers terre se lance
Et dit trestote sa creance
Et oreisons que il savoit,
Que sa mere apris li avoit.
Et li mestre des chevaliers
Le voit et dit: «Estez arriers,
Qu'a terre est de peor cheüz
Cil vaslez qui nos a veüz. (vv. 155-62, my emphasis)

³⁴ Topsfield, p. 227.

³⁵ 'bel' = *schön* (physically beautiful) OR *angenehm, lieb*=pleasant, friendly, T-L, I, 904-06.

Their far more logical assumption is that the *vaslez* is afraid at the *sight* of them, drawing quite explicitly the distinction between the *vaslez*'s childlike ignorance and their own adult and warlike selves. It is due to this that the main knight chooses to tread carefully; he does not wish to frighten the *vaslez*, as he is in need of important information from him:

Se nos alions tuit ansemble
Vers lui, il avroit, ce me sanble,
Si grant peor que il morroit,
Ne responder ne me porroit
A rien que je li demandasse.» (vv. 163-67)

As has been happening throughout the scene, the narrative has been peppered with forms of the word *veoir*³⁶, and this continues here, where it implies that for this *vaslez*, seeing, in its simplest form, equates to understanding. For example, after the knight has explained that he is not God, but that he is a knight, the *vaslez* says:

-Ainz mes chevalier ne *conui*,
Fet li *vaslez*, *ne nul n'an vi*
N'onques mes parler n'an oï;
Mes vos estes plus biaux que Deus. (vv. 176-79, my emphasis)

Chrétien's repetitive use of this verb (and verbs that mean the same, e.g. '*conui*', v. 176) is an ingenious, yet subtle way of expressing the fact that for the boy to fully *comprehend* something, he has to have already *seen* it. By making use of lexical insistence, as he does with the word *bel*, Chrétien is able to convey more inventively the impression he wishes to make, without resorting to the simpler method of stating his point in the text, and thus he forces his audience to read between the lines, and analyse not just themes, but also language, like when, for instance, the *vaslez* reverts to the adjective *luisanz*, which was already used in his previous description of the armour:

Car fusse je ore autreteus,
Einsi *luisanz* et einsi fez!» (vv. 180-81)

We gather that the reason the *vaslez* wished he could have been put together just like the beings before him is because of their luminous appearance, not because of any

³⁶ '*veoir*' = *sehen* (to see), *überprüfen* (to prove), *besichtigen* (to look at), *erleben* (to experience) and *verstehen* (to understand), T-L, XI, 218-37.

internal quality such as courage, nobility or prowess. The idea of a knight being 'made' is something I shall return to later.

The main knight approaches the *vaslez* and asks for the information he requires, but by now the boy has been completely distracted by the shiny, pretty things which adorn the knights and their horses and his concentration is focused entirely on objects. His only desire is to find out the name and the function of the various knightly accessories, and therefore, during a lengthy scene, he bombards the main knight with his questions about the objects which he carries (vv. 189-276).

Evidently, knowing the names of various objects is of remarkable interest for the *vaslez*, and he attaches great importance to naming; it is also something which is inherently childish, to demand to know the names of particular objects³⁷. And, whilst *he* wants to know about particular objects, *we* still know very little about him. As if in response to our lack of knowledge about this *vaslez*, another knight steps us during this naming scene to enquire what information the main knight has acquired from the *vaslez*. The knight replies that:

-Ne set mie totes les lois,
Fet li sire, se Deus m'amant,
Qu'a rien nule que li demant
Ne respont il onques a droit,
Einz demande de quanqu'il voit
Comant a non et qu'an an fet. (vv. 236-41)

If indeed the boy knows none of the knights' customs, then we must infer that he lives away from society. Chrétien is articulating the fact that the *vaslez*'s behaviour is, from the knights' point of view, unusual to say the least, and he also allows us an insight, through the reactions of the knights, into how a medieval audience might try to explain his behaviour. As it turns out, the knights' immediate reaction is not just that the *vaslez* behaves this way because he is young, but in point of fact, it may be because he is Welsh:

-Sire, sachiez bien antreset

³⁷ There is, of course, a particular irony here; we still have no clue as to the *name* of this boy, who is so fascinated by *names*. I return to this point below (p. 24).

Que Galois sont tuit par nature
 Plus fol que bestes an pasture:
 Cist est aussi come une beste; (vv. 242-45)

He is described as behaving like an animal (v. 244), and indeed the word *fol* quite often has animalistic connotations³⁸, so this is by no means an attractive quality. From the knights' perspective, this is to be expected of Welshmen, as their cultural assumption is that the Welsh are uncouth, uneducated and uncivilised. The medieval audience may well have nodded in recognition of this fact; thus, it could be seen as constituting a sort of "a-ha" moment, so to speak. Nevertheless, the audience must be a little puzzled as this situation is *still* distinctly unsettling. Is the *vaslez* to be the hero? Surely not, since the audience's *Erwartungshorizont*³⁹ would certainly have led them to expect someone more heroic! But conversely, if this *vaslez* is just comic relief, why, then, is Chrétien spending so much time on him?

Interestingly, the *vaslez* does display a certain amount of wiliness for someone so supposedly ignorant. He refuses to impart the information that the knight requires until he has obtained the information *he* wants: namely, the names and functions of the knightly objects. Instead of immediately answering the knight's question, he seems to deliberately ignore it in favour of asking his *own* questions. It is not, though, the significance of the objects in which he is interested, it is *solely* in their names and functions, as he appears to see things as *defined* solely by names and functions.⁴⁰ For example, a lance to him may mean a thing which is thrown, as it comes from the verb *lancer* (a verb used in conjunction with javelins in v. 97); we see him bewildered to find that it is in fact something with which one thrusts (v. 211, below). For his personal purposes a lance would be useless, as it would indeed be difficult to kill birds and animals with such an implement. It seems never to have even crossed his mind that people might endeavour to do combat with such objects:

-Dites-vos, fet il, qu'an la lance

³⁸ 'fol'=sinnlos, töricht (wie Tiere), (senseless, mad (like animals)), T-L, III, 1998.

³⁹ 'Horizon of expectation', a model for reading created by Hans Robert Jauss; see his *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. by Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), esp. p. 44.

⁴⁰ Just as he is defined as *li filz a la veve dame* (v. 347), as that is his name as well as function, objects, too, are defined in the same way.

Si con je faz mes javeloz?
 -Nenil, vaslez, tu es toz soz,
 Einz an fiert an tot demanois.
 -Donc vaut miauz li uns de cez trois
 Javeloz que vos veez ci;
 Car quanque je vuel an oci,
 Oisiaus et bestes a besoing,
 Et si les oci de tant loing
 Con l'an poirroit un bozon treire. (vv. 202-07)

Also interesting in this passage is the use of the word *soz*. Like *fol*, *soz* has connotations of animal behaviour, but where *fol* implies madness, *soz* implies sheer stupidity⁴¹. Clearly the knight sees this *vaslez* as inferior to himself and thus defines him by using the word *soz* (which, as we come to discover, is rather amusing as it is this *vaslez* who will indeed become the ultimate hero). However, the *vaslez* makes it clear at this point that his interest is firmly in the very anti-chivalric world of hunting (vv. 205-07), and this is expressed in their mutual use of language which creates a sort of *dialogue des sourds*, conveying the distance between the two parallel universes of hunting and chivalry. The boy speaks in inelegant diphthongs (e.g. *besoing* v. 205 and *loing*, v. 206)⁴² which suggest yet further the uncultivated nature of this *vaslez*.

Returning to the idea of a name defining an object, the *vaslez* then defines the knights: 'Vos qui avez non chevaliers,' (v. 190, my emphasis), and proceeds to question them about the objects they carry, which he believes must serve to *define* them as 'knights'. As Lacy says:

[H]e long remains entirely incapable of distinguishing symbol from meaning or, in regard to the code of chivalry, *forme* from *fond*. What interests him is form; that is, the physical trappings of knighthood. His fascination with those trappings blinds him to all else.⁴³

To further illustrate the point, it is worth noting what happens when the *vaslez* asks about the hauberk. When the knight explains that it is made of the sturdiest iron, the *vaslez* says:

-De ce, fet il, ne sai je rien;

⁴¹ 'soz' from 'sot'=*dumm*, *töricht* (stupid, like an animal), T-L, IX, 979-81.

⁴² /bəzɔ̃n/ and /lɔ̃n/.

⁴³ Lacy, p. 26.

Mes mout est *biaus*, se Deus me saut.
Qu'an feites vos et que vos *vaut*?

(vv. 266-67, my emphasis)

This consequently confirms the *vaslez*'s belief that shininess constitutes beauty, and, in this case, beauty equals value (*vaut*, v. 267), although not value in the monetary sense, rather whether it is useful⁴⁴. Also noteworthy is the fact that the knight's explanation of its function leads the *vaslez* to relate it once again to what is relevant to his own life experience, and that is, of course, hunting:

-Danz chevaliers, de teus haubers
Gart Deus les biches et les cers;
Que nul ocirre n'an porroie,
Ne ja mes après ne corroie.»

(vv. 273-76)

Again, this will be comic to the sophisticated reader as the *vaslez*'s preference for projectile weapons conveys a distinct lack of sophistication. In addition, he talks about the hauberk as if it is something with which one is born and then, about the rather savage killing of an animal. The first of these conveys an extraordinary, absurd ignorance; the second underlines yet again how very different the *vaslez*'s preoccupations are from the knights'. We shall discover later that the *vaslez* means quite literally that he thinks of armour as skin if we link this to the coming episode with the Red Knight, where, after the *vaslez* has savagely skewered the Knight in pursuit of his pretty armour, he fails in his attempt to remove the armour from the knight's body, as he does not know how to do so properly, effectively trying to 'skin' the knight, as one would a carcass. His belief that armour is actually 'skin', and thus physically attached to the body, is foreshadowed in the *vaslez*'s next enquiry of the knights in the forest: 'Fustes vos einsî nez?' (v. 282). He is incapable of comprehending the armour as something one wears *over* their skin; therefore it must be the case that one is born in armour. This then serves to clarify why the *vaslez* might beg that God should not outfit animals in this way (vv. 273-76), as it would make hunting impossible. Indeed it is only when the knight tells him that one is not in fact born this way (vv. 283-85), that he thinks to question how he might obtain some himself.

⁴⁴ 'vaut' from 'valoir'=*gültig sein* (to be of use or service), T-L, XI, 99.

The knight obliges the *vaslez* with the information he wants, informing him who is responsible for outfitting him this way:

N'a mie ancor cinc jorz antiers
Que tot cest hernois me dona
Li rois Artus, qui m'adoba. (vv. 288-90)

No sooner does the *vaslez* know where he must go to receive his heart's desire, than he finally tells the knight how *he* may find the answer to *his* question. However, despite the fact that the *vaslez* does hand over the information, the way his answer is structured seems somewhat confusing. It seems to offer us an insight into what is happening in the mind of this strange young boy. He begins by pointing out some woods on top of a mountain, where a river passes:

«Sire, ore esgardez
Cel plus haut bois que vos veez,
Qui cele montaigne avirone:
La sont li destroit de Valdone (vv. 295-98)

The knight, quite as we might, sees little use in the information and questions ‘-Et qu'est de ce, fet il, biaux frere?’ (v. 299). The *vaslez* continues that that is where his mother's harrowers are, and again, one might wonder where the *vaslez* is going with this line of instruction: ‘La sont li herceor ma mere,/ Qui ses terres hercent et erent;’ (vv. 300-01). Finally he tells us: ‘«...Et se caz janz i trespaserent./ S'il les virent, il le diront.» (vv. 302-03). Thus, he comes to the important part last after having described precisely the order in which the knight would have to do things so as to obtain the information he requires. Could one venture so far as to say that this in some way mirrors the *vaslez*'s perception of the world? It is almost as if this is a direct insight into the way his mind works; if so, it seems that he processes information systematically, in the sequence that one would actually have to experience it in order to arrive at the solution. The final answer, in this case, is that his mother's harrowers may have seen the knights and maidens, but before he tells the knight this, he describes their position geographically, and indeed gives this geographical description before giving any reason as to why geographical instructions may be of relevance. At the very least, the *vaslez* seems rather backward, as it were; we may, however, wonder whether this is yet another example

of the *vaslez*'s acknowledgement only of surface perceptions as opposed to true understanding.

The knights then agree to go with him in order to obtain the information they desire. This is not only of benefit to the knights, as they will receive the knowledge they have long been seeking, but it is also of benefit to the audience as we receive some more information as to why this *vaslez* seems quite so ignorant of all things worldly. It seems that his behaviour is not, as we were led to suspect, merely a symptom of being Welsh; there is another reason which may be at least partially responsible. Chrétien conveys this by way of the extreme reactions (v. 319) of the harrowers to seeing the *vaslez* with a group of knights:

Et quant cil virent lor seignor,
Si tramblerent tuit de peor.
Et savez por quoi il le firent?
Por les chevaliers que il virent,
Qui avuec lui armé venoient,
Que bien sorent, s'il li avoient
Lor afeire dit et lor estre,
Que il voldroit chevaliers estre
Et sa mere an istroit del san,
Que destorner le cuidoit an,
Que ja chevalier ne veïst
Ne lor afeire n'apreïst. (vv. 311-22)

Chrétien asks a rhetorical question (v. 313) to draw in the audience's curiosity, as we are about to find out something important. We discover that his mother has purposefully shielded him from all things chivalric, though as yet we do not know why. This certainly does help to elucidate why the *vaslez* might behave in such a way, especially when one considers that it is not just his mother who has been party to this deception, but also all those by whom, it seems, he has been surrounded throughout his life. As we later discover, it appears that the *vaslez*'s mother lost her two other sons and her husband to knighthood, and for this reason, she has endeavoured to keep her youngest son as far from chivalry as possible, in order to preserve what remains of her family. It seems here, though, that his hermit-like existence has brought about some rather negative results: he is entirely, as his reaction to the knights shows, undereducated, even about such things as religion, and

he is incapable of seeing beyond the surface to the higher meanings of situations and objects. One might well say at this point, his worldview is two-dimensional, and distinctly lacking in depth.

Once the knight has received the information about the group of knights and maidens that he requires, the *vaslez* wastes no time in requesting news of Arthur, the 'roi qui les chevaliers fet' (v. 333), because, just as a knight is defined by his armour, to the *vaslez*, the sole function of a king is to create knights by providing that armour⁴⁵. Again, one might consider this function to play a part in what could be considered the surface appearance of a king, which explains why the *vaslez* chooses to define a king so⁴⁶.

So, at this juncture, we know that this *vaslez* is unusual. He is Welsh, and therefore assumed to be primitive. However there is more to it than this. He has led a purposefully sheltered life, and has, it seems, had no other informant than his mother. He is fixated on objects which he deems to be pretty or attractive; he is intent on getting what he wants by any ways and means necessary, be it withholding information, asking endless questions, or even resorting to violence. So what is Chrétien trying to convey? Evidently, these characteristics have not just been plucked out of the air. Rather they must conform to some view or purpose, and it is this that we shall now explore. This odd preoccupation with objects, this fascination with light and brightness and colour and this insistence on naming, are, we shall discover, characteristic of the *vaslez*; I shall argue that it is precisely these characteristics that evolve as the romance develops, and that they are one of the means, and an important one, whereby one can trace the *vaslez*'s growing maturity.

⁴⁵ Schwartz, note 3 (para. 4 of 62).

⁴⁶ There is an interesting moment in some manuscripts where the boy is then asked for his name by the knight, to which he can only respond that it is *Biaus Filz* (vv. 344-60). This is suspected to have been added by a scribe at some point in textual history, and as such I will return to the significance of the *vaslez*'s name at a later stage, when it is more relevant to Chrétien's telling of the story.

Chapter 2:

Theories on the Development of Childhood, Imagination and Perception in the Middle Ages

Let us start with this initial scene. A modern reader, surely, cannot avoid finding the *vaslez*'s preoccupations, with objects, with names, with his own individual needs, distinctly childish, not to say infantile- and it is to this that I shall now turn. I propose first of all to ratify our initial reactions by looking at some modern theorists of childhood: is it indeed the case that these preoccupations are childish, and if so, in what sense? I shall then turn to the medieval concept of the childish, to consider whether a medieval reader's reaction might have been very similar: would a medieval audience, in other words, see the *vaslez*'s behaviour in this scene as unbecomingly infantile (especially given what we shall discover about the *vaslez*'s age)? Was the medieval model of childhood socialisation and childhood perception in any way comparable to ours?

All modern theorists of child development agree, in their initial approach to childhood, on a particular point of view as being important for the understanding of the young child: that is, of the child as a *social being*.⁴⁷ What is meant by this is that from the moment of birth the child is surrounded by other co-specifics, a small portion of which share the child's gene pool, a larger portion of which will influence and in turn be influenced by the child, and finally the largest portion, which forms the background in which these other interactions will take place. The smallest segment we call family; the larger comprises lovers, friends, acquaintances, and even strangers; and the largest segment is the culture. Thus human newborns are surrounded by a large and diverse social network, and it is within this array that the

⁴⁷ It is important to here acknowledge that the following pages in no way constitute a comprehensive overview of the modern views of childhood psychology. They serve merely to offer a brief introduction to the subject.

developmental processes of the organism occur. Theorists tell us that the major task of the newborn is the adaptation to this environment of people, and it is due to this that the feature of *sociability* is assigned to humans. Not only must the newborn adapt to this world, but also there is considerable evidence to suggest that many sensory and cognitive abilities of infants centre on making sense of their social environment.⁴⁸

This relates quite clearly to the initial scene with the as yet unnamed *vaslez*, and provides a good outline for how we can begin to understand this character. The *vaslez* does seem to conform to this modern picture of a child making sense of his social environment via his sensory and cognitive abilities, and thus the point of view of modern childhood psychology constitutes a useful angle from which his actions can be examined. We have already said that the boy is preoccupied with things he sees, hears and feels, in other words with sense-provoking stimuli; indeed we have established that until this moment, the boy's socialisation and education seem to have been controlled entirely by his mother. Therefore, we might argue, when these strangers arrive wielding new and exciting objects, he tries to make sense of them by utilising the only tool he has: his underdeveloped sensory and cognitive abilities. For example, the clattering noises that the knights make as they ride through the forest lead him to suspect that devils are coming his way as the noises *frighten* him and his mother told him that devils are *frightening* things:

«Par m'ame,
Voir me dist ma mere, ma dame,
Qui me dist que deable sont
Plus esfreé que riens del mont, (vv. 113-16)

Thus he makes sense of the situation by relying, firstly, on a sensory impression, and secondly, by linking that rather literally (and via a false syllogism which any educated medieval audience would certainly recognise) with something he has been told by his mother.

⁴⁸ For a full explanation of the socialisation of children, see Michael Lewis, 'Social Development in Infancy and Early Childhood', in *Handbook of Infant Development*, ed. by Joy Doniger Osofsky, 2nd edn, (New York, etc.: John Wiley & Sons, 1987), pp. 419-93 (p. 419).

Worth noting here is the extent of the boy's reliance on his mother's advice. He mentions her time and time again as the source of his education (see lines 114, 142 and 150). By the end of the scene, though, we know that this education has been limited in many ways, which may help to explain why the knights find him such a strange boy. Again we might see this from the point of view of modern childhood psychology. Cognitively speaking, the process of making children social involves to a large extent training them to use adult forms of communication, thought and conceptions of reality.⁴⁹ Clearly, we might suggest, the *vaslez* has not been taught, and has therefore not yet mastered, these 'adult forms' of perception, and so by society's standards (embodied here by the knights' opinion of the boy), he is unusually childish. The boy's reliance on his mother is total, comprising everything from education to nourishment, and he seems to take everything she says in a fully literal manner. For example, he makes another false syllogism in saying that (as his mother told him) angels are *bel*, ('Les plus beles choses qui soient', v. 144), so in seeing something which he deems *bel*, he assumes it must be an angel. According to a modern analysis this reliance on the mother would place him in the mental age band of 0-2 years, when the maternal attachment and contact needs are highest. This is the time when the baby requires the most mothering in order to simply survive.⁵⁰ Relating this maternal reliance to the text, again we see a clear parallel: the mother seems of utmost importance in the *vaslez*'s life, indeed, he seems unable to survive without her nurturing and advice, as, despite his all too literal interpretation of her words, without these words he would have no way at all of comprehending the world.

But to return to how the boy interprets things via his senses. Perhaps most clearly depicted is the *vaslez*'s fascination with the things he *sees*, and in particular, those things which are brightly coloured and, in many cases, sparkling, like the knights' armour and accoutrements. I mentioned briefly that when the boy sees the armour he is drawn to it rather as children tend to be drawn to particularly striking objects; a

⁴⁹ Lewis, pp. 419-20.

⁵⁰ Vidal S. Clay, 'The Effect of Culture on Mother-Child Tactile Communication', *The Family Coordinator*, 17 (1968), 204-10 (p. 206).

modern psychologist would argue that this finds its explanation in the fact that the eyesight of a small child takes time to develop, so at first they are attracted more to luminous colours and objects, as these are what they are capable of distinguishing most clearly:

Neonates seem to be limited in visual acuity, contrast sensitivity, and colour perception. That is, they are less able to discriminate fine detail in visual patterns, and they are less able to discriminate differences in luminance contrast (i.e., shades of grey), and between colours, than are older infants and adults. Thus, they respond mostly to more striking images, such as shiny or colourful objects.⁵¹

In addition, scientifically speaking, it appears that the visual cortex, whilst remaining immature, does function at birth. Newborn infants can clearly remember what they see, if in a rudimentary form, and demonstrate rapid learning about the world, and a vital part of remembering objects which they have seen is learning to recognise their names.⁵² Indeed, this is shown in the fact that the boy demands to know the name and function of every piece of armour that the knight carries, suggesting he is making the effort to learn about the things he *sees* by means of *hearing* their names.

This 'naming game' in which the *vaslez* engages the knight is a game we might recognise as particularly childish. Psychologists consider that this is something vital to the socialisation of the child, for whilst a child may actually begin by responding to his name, or the word 'no', it 'soon becomes easier to direct the child's attention to objects in the world by naming them'.⁵³ It is considered a fundamental part of learning about the world; to know the name of an object is to define it, and the *vaslez* clearly has a preoccupation with being able to define not only objects, but also

⁵¹ Alan Slater and Scott P. Johnson, 'Visual Sensory and Perceptual Abilities of the Newborn: Beyond the Blooming Buzzing Confusion', in *The Development of Sensory, Motor and Cognitive Capacities in Early Infancy: From Perception to Cognition*, ed. by Francesca Simion and George Butterworth (Hove: Psychology, 1998), pp. 121-41 (p. 126).

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁵³ Elizabeth Bates, Barbara O'Connell and Cecilia Shore, 'Language and Communication in Infancy', in *Handbook of Infant Development*, ed. by Joy Doniger Osofsky, 2nd edn (New York, etc.: John Wiley & Sons, 1987), pp. 149-203 (p. 169).

people, such as the knights ('vos qui avez non chevaliers, v. 190), and Arthur, 'the king who makes knights' ('roi qui chevaliers fet', v. 333).⁵⁴

Modern standards, then, might well suggest that the *vaslez* we are presented with is characterised by a number of features which we, and modern theorists of childhood, would see as identifiably infantile. This being the case, a question arises: do these infantile features find their roots not only in *modern* theory, but also in *medieval* conceptions of childhood? Indeed, would a medieval writer have thought in a similar way about childhood perception, and would he have had any very clear understanding of what is meant by a 'psychology' of childhood?

There are of course limitations that one must acknowledge and seek to overcome before embarking on such an analysis, such as 'the comparative paucity of sources and the inherent tendency of the evidence to reflect ideology rather than social practice or the privileged social elites over common people and males over females.'⁵⁵ I shall, therefore, turn first to one of the most influential writers on medieval childhood, Philippe Ariès, whose *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime*, first published in 1960, has been one of the most significant studies of childhood in the Middle Ages, and the starting point for subsequent discussions- although, in recent years, a number of his conclusions have been seriously challenged.

Briefly, Ariès argues- perhaps shockingly to the modern reader- that medieval thought did not consider childhood as a separate stage in human development and that it failed to perceive a transitional period between infancy and adulthood. In his view, medieval society perceived young people as nothing more than small-scale adults; there existed none of the modern preoccupations with education and the

⁵⁴ It is important also to remember that there are other preoccupations with 'nom' elsewhere in the text. We do not, as yet, even know the *vaslez*'s name, and in the mother's coming advice, she tells him to always ask for the name of any 'prodome' whose company he keeps (vv. 560-63).

⁵⁵ P. J. P. Goldberg, Felicity Riddy and Mike Tyler, 'Introduction: After Ariès', in *Youth in the Middle Ages*, ed. by P. J. P. Goldberg and Felicity Riddy (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2004), pp. 1-10 (p. 7).

physical, moral and sexual problems of childhood. This does not mean that children were forsaken, neglected or despised; simply, he is suggesting that there was no awareness of that particular nature which distinguishes the child from the adult.⁵⁶

This, he claims, is suggested, or even proved, primarily by the fact that:

L'art medieval, jusqu'au XII^e siècle environ, ne connaissait pas l'enfance ou ne tentait pas de la représenter; on a peine à croire que cette absence était due à la gaucherie ou à l'impuissance. On pensera plutôt qu'il n'y avait pas de place pour l'enfance dans ce monde. [...] Cela laisse à penser aussi que dans la domaine des mœurs vécue, et non plus seulement dans celui d'une transposition esthétique, l'enfance était un temps de transition, vite passé, et dont on perdait aussi vite le souvenir.⁵⁷

He also suggests that medieval society did not prioritise the role of the mother in the development of the child because 'dès que l'enfant pouvait vivre sans la sollicitude constante de sa mère, de sa nourrice ou de sa remueuse, il appartenait à la société des adultes.'⁵⁸ In addition, he claims that this lack of maternal bond is to be put down to the high infant mortality rates of the time⁵⁹, as apparently mothers may have been unsurprised if their child died, so they did not go as far as to attach themselves emotionally to the child:

On n'avait pas l'idée de conserver l'image d'un enfant que celui-ci ait vécu et soit devenu homme, ou qu'il soit mort en bas âge. Dans le premier cas, l'enfance n'était qu'un passage sans importance, qu'il n'y avait pas lieu de fixer dans le souvenir; dans le second cas, celui de l'enfant mort, on ne pensait pas que cette petite chose disparue trop tôt fût digne de mémoire : il y en avait trop, dont la survie était si problématique !⁶⁰

He denies, then, that children have any status other than that of miniature adults; this explains, no doubt, why Ariès does not then consider in any form the possibility that there might have been a difference in the concepts of how children perceive the world. It would, then, be odd that the *Conte du Graal* might suggest an awareness of a kind of infantile nature which is expressed in the behaviour of *li filz a la veve dame*. The knights' reactions to him alone are enough to suggest that this boy's behaviour is oddly immature. So, in this case at least, the opinions of Ariès may be

⁵⁶ Philippe Ariès, *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1973), p. 177.

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 53-55.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 177.

⁵⁹ Confirmation of the wide-spread problem of infant mortality can be found in Jens N. Faaborg, *Les Enfants dans la littérature française du Moyen Âge* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum, 1997), pp. 85-91.

⁶⁰ Ariès, p. 60; for a converse opinion of how the mother felt for her child, see Faaborg, pp. 327-32.

seen to be problematical, as Chrétien does precisely what Ariès suggests that no medieval author would have done: he conveys an interest in childhood perception and development⁶¹. He draws the audience's attention to the strangely childish behaviour of the main character, the characteristics of whom seem oddly infantile to the modern reader. But what about the medieval reader? Might he have seen the underdeveloped skills of perception, the reliance on the mother, and the fascination with the names of particular objects as evidence of childishness? A number of critics, since the publication of *L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime*, have taken serious issue with what they see in the work as broad and unfounded generalisation.⁶²

Whilst modern critics do acknowledge the impact of Ariès' work on the subject, they have been quick to show the many ways in which childhood can clearly be proven to have had a separate status to adulthood. Colin Heywood, for instance, points out that there was some attempt to assign a legal status to children:

Medieval law codes contained a few concessions to the minority status of children. For example, they usually protected the inheritance rights of orphans, and sometimes required the consent of children to a marriage.⁶³

Shahar, too, explains that Ariès' theories (as well as the theories of his advocates) were rather too narrow, as:

Ariès and his disciples chose to ignore the immutable and universal elements, perceiving recognition of the special needs of children and readiness to devote effort to ensuring their survival as historical phenomena and the outcome of cultural conditioning. But, despite this appreciation of the role of cultural conditioning, they essentially ignored the wider cultural context in which children were raised in the past. The high rate of mortality of infants and children in the Middle Ages was the consequence of limited medical skills and not the absence of emotional investment.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Colin Heywood, *A History of Childhood: Children and Childhood in the West from Medieval to Modern Times* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), p. 110.

⁶² Heywood, p. 11; see also Shulamith Shahar, *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 3; James A. Schultz, *The Knowledge of Childhood in the German Middle Ages, 1100-1350* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), pp. 2-5; Louis Haas, *The Renaissance Man and His Children: Childbirth and Early Childhood in Florence 1300-1600* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), pp. 10-11; Goldberg, Ridy and Tyler, pp. 1-3; Lloyd DeMause, 'The Evolution of Childhood', in *The History of Childhood*, ed. by Lloyd DeMause (New York etc.: Harper & Row, 1975), pp. 1-73 (pp. 5-6) and Faaborg, pp. 16-22.

⁶³ Heywood, p. 14.

⁶⁴ Shahar, pp. 1-2.

Awareness that childhood is a specific stage does not necessarily mean, however, that this was viewed *positively*. On the contrary, children were considered to have been born into Original Sin, meaning that the positive faculties of reason and understanding were still dormant in the child, and Shahar suggests that it may have been for *this* reason that children were often absent from literature and art- not because childhood was not believed to constitute a separate stage in development.⁶⁵ Desclais Berkvam recommends that rather than dismissing the Middle Ages as having had no awareness of childhood, we should actually ask 'whether there might not have existed [...] a consciousness of childhood so unlike our own that we do not recognize it.'⁶⁶

As for Ariès' idea of the 'absent role of the mother', there is much to suggest that the mother actually played the *primary* role in the child's development, and indeed that her feelings were actually very strong for her child.⁶⁷ It was the mother who was responsible for the basic and religious education of the child:

The mother played a fundamental part in her children's lives, no matter what their age. It was she who provided their basic education, when they were children certainly, but also when they were older. The transmission of the Christian faith was essentially carried out within the family, taking an oral form, with the mother playing the primary role.⁶⁸

The *vaslez*, when faced with both 'devils' and 'angels', does indeed fall back onto his mother's religious teaching to explain the phenomenon. As he tells us, it is his mother who has informed him about angels, devils and God, thus conforming to what we have learned about how a child would most likely have received religious education. In addition, he demonstrates at least a limited knowledge of religious gestures in letting us hear that he knows how to cross himself, even though he actually chooses not to when he hears the 'devils', favouring a more violent

⁶⁵ Shahar tells us that this view of children came from the theories of Augustine of Hippo (to be discussed later), pp. 14-16.

⁶⁶ Doris Desclais Berkvam, 'Nature and Nurture: A Notion of Medieval Childhood and Education', *Mediaevalia*, 9 (1983), 165-80 (p. 165).

⁶⁷ Danièle Alexandre-Bidon and Didier Lett, *Children in the Middle Ages: Fifth-Fifteenth Centuries*, trans. by Jody Gladding (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), p. 54.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 61; see also Barbara A. Hanawalt, *Growing Up in Medieval London: The Experience of Childhood in History* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 9; Doris Desclais Berkvam, *Enfance et maternité dans la littérature française des XII^e et XIII^e siècles* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1981), pp. 73-74 and p. 100 and Faaborg, p. 192.

approach. He applies a kind of religious brush to every canvas he sees in the form of objects, and this, according to Alexandre-Bidon and Lett, may be seen to be attributable to the mother's religious education of her child:

The mother took the children to church, showed them the sacred images and statues, taught them the gestures for the prayers. This *religious* teaching by the mother no doubt involved all the *objects* of daily life.⁶⁹

Of course, the mother was not the only educator of children. Other well-known educators of the Middle Ages were monks or religious people such as hermits, and they, too, were always thinking hard about different ways of transmitting their culture to the younger generation:

This education had to begin as early as possible, because in the Middle Ages, people firmly believed that very young children possessed a sort of "unconscious memory", that everything children saw or heard at a young age marked them forever. They often compared the soul of the small child to clay or soft wax in which everything leaves an indelible mark. That was why parents and educators needed to be so careful about the words and gestures they used in addressing the young.⁷⁰

This is crucial to an understanding of the *vaslez* we are presented with in the *gaste forest* (not least because, as we shall come to see, the *vaslez*'s educators come in the guises of several different characters). A medieval audience knows that he has received some sort of an education from his mother, yet they are amused to see him display continual miscomprehension of the things he *sees* and *hears*. It is only at the end of the scene that we understand that it may be that precisely what Alexandre-Bidon and Lett suggest (above) has actually happened: his mother has *deliberately* limited his education, perhaps more so than would have been considered normal, thus leaving this so-called 'indelible mark' on the boy such that he is unable to interpret what would otherwise be conceived as entirely ordinary objects. This then raises the question of what children were actually considered *capable* of perceiving and of how their more sophisticated perceptions might then develop.

⁶⁹ Alexandre-Bidon and Lett, p. 61 (my emphasis); see also Faaborg, pp. 191-92 for a discussion of the details of religious education in the Middle Ages.

⁷⁰ Alexandre-Bidon and Lett, p. 39.

Shahar and Heywood give us an insight into where medieval theories of perception were derived from, and that is Classical thought. Shahar initially cites Aristotle as a major source from which medieval ideas of childhood are derived.⁷¹ Even today, the dominant view of children is often said to embody what we might call a broadly “Aristotelian”⁷² conception of childhood. Matthews also tells us, though, that many adults today have this “broadly Aristotelian conception of childhood” without having actually read any Aristotle. Nevertheless, it informs their understanding of their own relationship toward the children around them. Thus they consider the fundamental responsibility that they bear toward their children to be the obligation that they have to provide the kind of supportive environment that those children need to develop into normal adults, where normal adults are supposed to have the biological and psychological structures in place to enable them to perform the functions which society assumes that normal, standard adults can perform.⁷³

That this modern concept of childhood is only *broadly* Aristotelian is mainly due to the fact that (as Matthews argues) most have not actually read his work, but despite this apparent lack of first-hand knowledge, Aristotle is nevertheless considered to have had extensive influence on modern perceptions of childhood. We might infer, then, that in medieval times Aristotle would have been at the very least *equally* influential, as we would expect medieval theorists to have been *very* familiar with Aristotle’s work, where most modern audiences are not. And those familiar with his work would have inevitably have based their own theories on Aristotle’s, generally speaking, rather negative view of childhood. Shahar draws our attention to this, saying that Bartholomaeus Anglicus’ rather pessimistic view (to whom and to which

⁷¹ Shahar, p. 15. Note also: ‘The *Ethics* was one of the set texts of the medieval university curriculum, and had been translated into French by Nicole Oresme, thus we can know that Aristotle’s work was not only widely read but also highly influential’, in V. A. Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: The First Five Canterbury Tales* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984), p. 79.

⁷² According to this conception, ‘a human child is an immature specimen of this organism type, human, which, by nature, has the potentiality to develop into a mature specimen with the structure, form, and function of a normal or standard adult.’ Gareth Matthews, ‘The Philosophy of Childhood’, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2002 Edition)*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta, [<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2002/entries/childhood/>] [accessed 24 May 2004], (para. 1 of 43).

⁷³ Matthews, (para. 3 of 43).

I will shortly return, cf. p. 49 and pp. 51-52) of the child finds much of its foundation in the fact that:

According to Aristotle, the child lacks the capacity to choose, which is the distinguishing feature of the reasonable creature; he is absorbed in sensual gratifications alone, and, since he is incapable of noble actions, he cannot be happy. Childhood is the lowest stage in human life.⁷⁴

Aristotle affirms why this is so in the *Politics*; it is because:

The deliberative faculty of children is imperfect, and so when we attribute virtues to them, we use a different standard from the one that is appropriate for free male adults. [...] Slaves are said to possess the deliberative faculty not at all; women are said to possess it, but without authority; and children are said to possess it imperfectly. [...] Children will develop the capacity to deliberate, but during their immaturity they live emotionally and without reflection.⁷⁵

In addition, we also see this negativity in his tendency to lump the child together with the animal, as though they constitute a single contrast case to the ethically mature adult, e.g. he claims that pleasures are bad because: "Pleasures are pursued by children and brutes"⁷⁶ and "the natural dispositions are found in children and brutes, but without intelligence they are obviously apt to be harmful"⁷⁷. Effectively he is telling us that, along with the animal, the child lacks the deliberative capacities for choice and action characteristic of the adult. Both pursue pleasures which are not unqualifiedly good and lack the sort of judgment than can oppose and control desires; 'thus they can neither be akratic nor enkratic (continent or controlled)'.⁷⁸

This lack of restraint and this excess of intemperance are elements on which Aristotle concentrates in the *Ethics*, and they are to constitute the main points in his

⁷⁴ Shahar, p. 15.

⁷⁵ W. W. Fortenbaugh, 'Aristotle on Slaves and Women', in *Articles on Aristotle 2: Ethics and Politics*, ed. by Jonathan Barnes, Malcolm Schofield and Richard Sorabji (London: Duckworth, 1977), pp. 137-38, quoting from Aristotle, 'Politics', in *The Complete Works of Aristotle translated into English*, ed. by J. A. Smith and W. D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910-52), I, 1260a-12-18. For references to Aristotle, I shall use the form appropriate to the particular edition from which I am quoting, as some editions use different formats in their layout.

⁷⁶ Aristotle, *Ethics*, trans. by J. A. K. Thomson, rev. edn (London: Penguin, 1976), p. 250, a point confirmed by Nancy Sherman in her 'The Habituation of Character', in *Aristotle's 'Ethics': Critical Essays*, ed. by Nancy Sherman (New York etc.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), pp. 231-60 (esp. 233-34).

⁷⁷ *Ethics*, trans. by Thomson, p. 223.

⁷⁸ Sherman, p. 234.

perception of children. The term he applies to children is 'licentious' (at least in this translation, that is⁷⁹), saying that this describes them most precisely:

We apply the name of licentiousness to the faults of children too, because they bear a certain resemblance to it. Which is called after the other makes no difference for our present purpose, but obviously the later use must come from the earlier. The metaphor seems not to be a bad one, because restraint is necessary for anything that has low appetites and a marked capacity for growth; and these qualities are possessed in the highest degree by desire and a child.⁸⁰

He attributes this licentiousness to their age, as a child does not have the capacity for reason and also displays a *distinct attraction for sensual pleasures*, without restraint nor thought for the consequences, as described here:

Children [...] live as their *desires* impel them, and it is in them that the *appetite for pleasant things* is strongest; so unless this is rendered docile and submissive to authority it will pass all bounds. For in an irrational being the *appetite for what gives it pleasure* is insatiable and indiscriminate, and the exercise of the desire increases its innate tendency; and if these appetites are strong and violent, they actually drive out reason.⁸¹

The opening remarks of the *Metaphysics* confirms this liking for sensual pleasures all the more:

All human beings desire to know by nature. Children give us the most evidence of this in the *pleasure* that they take from their *senses*; for even apart from their [the senses'] usefulness they are enjoyed by children for their own sake, and above all others, the sense of eyesight. [...] For this more than the other senses enables us to know and brings to light many distinctions.⁸²

And this love of sensual pleasures, he tells us, was considered almost repugnant to the adult, as it would render one incapable of attaining "happiness". Indeed, he considers it practically impossible that an adult should find enjoyment in the same

⁷⁹ This translation's accuracy is obviously difficult to judge. The term is translated as 'self-indulgence' both in 'Ethica Nicomachea', in *The Works of Aristotle*, trans. by W. D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1915), 1119a36 and in 'Nicomachean Ethics', in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. by Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols (Guildford and Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), II, pp. 1729-867 (p. 1767), however what is most important is the extent of the 'negativity towards children' that the translation manages to convey. Both versions appear to do this with equal skill, and so the choice of word, in this case, is not as important as the impression given by it.

⁸⁰ *Ethics*, trans. by Thomson, p. 140-41.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 141 (my emphasis); see also M. F. Burnyeat's discussion of the child's love of sensual pleasures in 'Aristotle on Learning to be Good', in *Aristotle's 'Ethics': Critical Essays*, ed. by Nancy Sherman (New York etc.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), pp. 205-30 (esp. 215-17).

⁸² Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. by W. D. Ross, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), I, 980a207 (my emphasis).

things as children, as children like different things from adults, precisely because their perception of things is different:

Nobody would choose to live out his life with the mentality of a child, even if he continued to take the greatest pleasure in the things that children like; nor would anyone choose to find enjoyment in doing something very disgraceful.⁸³

Children [...] believe that the things they prize are the most important; so it is natural that just as different things seem valuable to children and adults, so they should seem different also to good and bad men.⁸⁴

This helps to explain why an adult may not understand a child's love for a particular object: for example, a child may perceive an object which is new to them, (and, of course, they will not have encountered as many objects as an adult may have), thus they may find enjoyment in it simply because of its novelty, whereas an adult may not have the same experience because it is an object they have already encountered several times. And, to examine yet further this idea of 'happiness', Aristotle goes on to explain why it is that *children* cannot experience 'happiness': something essentially due to the fact that their lack of experience means that they lack the capacity to achieve noble deeds:

He [a child] is not yet a doer of the sorts of things in question [noble deeds], because of his age; those children that are said to be happy are being called blessed because of their prospects. This is because, as we have said, happiness requires both complete excellence and a complete life.⁸⁵

In addition to these comments on the characteristics of children, in the *Politics* Aristotle makes some very interesting comments on the rearing, education and nurturing of children. What he says does seem to support what Ariès said about a lack of bond between mother and child, as it seems that deformed children were considered eligible for culling- the difference being, of course, that whilst Ariès says that mothers did not actually *bother* forming the mother-child bond because they expected that the child might die due to infant mortality rates, Aristotle gives the

⁸³ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. by Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London and New York: Penguin, 1998), pp. 317-18.

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 327.

⁸⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by Christopher Reese (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 105; see also T. H. Irwin's reiteration of this point in 'Permanent Happiness: Aristotle and Solon', in *Aristotle's 'Ethics': Critical Essays*, ed. by Nancy Sherman (New York etc.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), pp. 1-33 (esp. 12-13).

impression that the mother-child bond was weak by telling us that they were willing to see their disabled children exposed to death for some sort of “greater good”⁸⁶:

There should certainly be a law to prevent the rearing of deformed children. On the other hand, there should be a law, in all states where the system of social habits is opposed to unrestricted increase, to prevent the exposure of children to death *merely* in order to keep the population down.⁸⁷

He even suggests early exposure to the elements as a way of preparing the child for its future and to promote good health, thus reinforcing the fact that, at least from a modern perspective, the mother-child bond must have been weaker, as it seems mothers should even be willing to allow their *healthy* children to suffer for this “greater good”⁸⁸:

When children are born, their physical powers will be seriously affected, during their growth, by the nature of the nourishment which they are given. [...] It is good to habituate children to the endurance of cold from their earliest infancy; and this is a practice which greatly conduces to their general health, as well as hardening them in advance for military service.⁸⁹

Perhaps most importantly for us, Aristotle makes a point of drawing our attention to a clear awareness of various stages which were considered inherent in the development of a child:

The earliest years will best be handled in the ways we have just described [see previous citation], and in other similar ways. The next stage of the child's life, which lasts to the age of five, is one which cannot be set any lessons, or put to any compulsory tasks, for fear of hindering its growth. [...] Care should be taken [...] to determine the sort of tales and stories which children of this age ought to be told. All these things should prepare the way for the occupations of later years; and even the games of children should be for the most part mimicries of what will later be earnest. [...] The stage of life through which children pass down to the age of seven is bound to be one of home training; and young as they are they will be likely to contract vulgar habits from anything vulgar they hear or see.⁹⁰

In particular, he then goes on to explain how one should consider these stages very seriously when educating a child, as children absorb everything, as if they were

⁸⁶ For a fuller discussion of the effects of infant mortality and birthing difficulties on medieval parent-child relations, see Mary Martin McLaughlin, ‘Survivors and Surrogates: Children and Parents from the Ninth to the Thirteenth Centuries’, in *The History of Childhood*, ed. by Lloyd DeMause (New York etc.: Harper & Row, 1975), pp. 101-81 (pp. 112-23).

⁸⁷ Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. by Ernest Barker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), pp. 385-86.

⁸⁸ This is also reiterated by DeMause, pp. 25-32, which speaks also of the culling of illegitimate children.

⁸⁹ *Politics*, trans. by Barker, p. 386.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 387.

sponges, but their lack of experience means that they have the capacity neither to perceive nor to interpret correctly, which can be dangerous (cf. last sentence of previous quotation). He suggests, therefore, that:

There should be two different periods of education – the first from the age of seven to that of puberty; the second from puberty to the age of twenty-one. Those who divide man's life into seven-year periods are on the whole right. But the divisions which we ought to follow [when planning a child's education] are the divisions made by nature herself.⁹¹

He then writes at length about how children should receive a standardised education, whereby children are tutored in groups, receiving the same education as all other children; he considers individual parental education to be inadequate as it means that a child may only learn information through the personal perceptions of a sole person or unit, and therefore take on biased perceptions of objects and situations during their development⁹², such as we can see with our *vaslez* and the limited education that he has received from his mother, his sole informant. Disregarding, for a moment, from which sources it is that children learn certain perceptions, it is evident from our discussion that Aristotle considered children to lack the ability to perceive and interpret clearly, and he thus continues by analysing perception and, more importantly, sense perception quite comprehensively.

Let us look, then, initially at the senses, which are the organs which allow us to perceive. Aristotle tells us that each sense has its own particular objects that it can perceive; that is, they each in turn have their own perceivable things, for example, colour is perceived by and perceptible only to the sense of sight. In this way, each sense provides its own function:

Seeing, regarded as a supply for the primary wants of life, is in its own right the superior sense; but for developing thought hearing incidentally takes the precedence. The faculty of seeing, thanks to the fact that all bodies are coloured, brings tidings of multitudes of distinctive qualities of all sorts; viz. *figure, magnitude, motion, number*; while hearing announces only the distinctive qualities of sound, and, to some few animals, those also of voice.⁹³

⁹¹ *Politics*, trans. by Barker, p. 389.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 390-415 (esp. 391).

⁹³ Aristotle, 'Sense and Sensibilia' in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. by Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols (Guildford and Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), I, pp. 693-713 (p. 694).

In *On the Soul* he tells us that:

Thinking and understanding are regarded as akin to a form of perceiving; for in the one as well as the other the soul discriminates and is cognizant of something which is. [...] They all [ancient thinkers such as Empedocles and Homer] look upon thinking as a bodily process like perceiving, and hold that like is understood as well as perceived by like.⁹⁴

And if 'like is perceived by like', Aristotle thus seems to claim that a sense organ in one way or another becomes 'like' its object when it perceives. This is further illustrated in *De Anima*: "The sense faculty is like the actual sense-object – it is affected as being unlike but on being affected it becomes like and is such as what acts upon it."⁹⁵ Thus, that which can perceive (i.e. the sense organ) is *potentially* such as the object of sense is *actually*, meaning that objects of perception are *material*, whilst the perceiving organ becomes like the perceived object, but in an abstract or potential way⁹⁶: objects of perception are able to act on the individual senses because they have properties which are in certain ways like the sense organs themselves. He ponders therefore:

Why do we not perceive the senses themselves or why without the stimulation of external objects do they not produce sensation, seeing that they contain in themselves fire, earth, and all the other elements of which- either in themselves or in respect of their incidental attributes- there is perception? The power of sense is parallel to what it is combustible, for that never ignites itself spontaneously, but requires an agent which has the power of starting ignition; otherwise it could have set itself on fire, and have needed actual fire to set it ablaze.⁹⁷

Therefore, in order to perceive, we must have some sort of stimulus, be it an object, a noise or a sensation. Aristotle then asserts that we 'use the word *perceive* in two ways'⁹⁸. He says that that which has the power to hear or see, *sees* or *hears* even though it may be dormant at the time, and also that which is actively seeing or hearing also *sees* and *hears*. Thus, he concludes that 'sense, too, must have two

⁹⁴ Aristotle, 'On the Soul: Book III', in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. by Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols (Guildford and Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), I, pp. 675-92 (p. 679).

⁹⁵ Aristotle, *De Anima (On the Soul)* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), pp. 171-72; see also Stephen Everson, *Aristotle on Perception* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), p. 141.

⁹⁶ Also confirmed by Everson, p. 149.

⁹⁷ Aristotle, 'On the Soul: Book II', in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. by Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols, (Guildford and Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), I, pp. 656-75 (p. 663).

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

meanings: sense potential, and sense actual.⁹⁹ This is elucidated further when one considers that 'to be a sentient' means either to have a certain power or to manifest a certain activity.

The significance of this is that medieval conceptions of childhood and perception are in large part derived from Aristotle, so we can consider his remarks to be at least primitive evidence of what a medieval audience may have expected of childhood and perceptual capabilities. After Aristotle, Heywood¹⁰⁰ tells us that one of the next major thinkers on the subject was Augustine of Hippo¹⁰¹, considered as the instigator of the medieval idea that the infant was born in sin being the fruit of his parents' sexual intercourse.¹⁰² Shahar suggests that not only did Augustine perceive childhood as a period in which reason and understanding were still dormant, but, describing the infant born in sin, he emphasised its drives: importunity, jealousy, anger and aggressiveness, and thus totally rejected the good and innocent image of childhood.¹⁰³ In his *Confessions*, Augustine speaks candidly on his youth and his observations on the education of youth, as well as many other subjects. For our purposes, George Howie has put together an excellent collection of Augustine's thoughts on childhood and education which is useful for a concise summary of how Augustine viewed the child, and thus creates a good picture of the theories from which the medieval audience derived its ideas on the subject.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Aristotle, *On the Soul: Book II*, p. 663.

¹⁰⁰ Heywood, pp. 14-15.

¹⁰¹ Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430): One of key church fathers in the development of Christian theology. He became Bishop of Hippo. One of the things Augustine is most widely known for is his development of the doctrine of original sin, in opposition to the more optimistic doctrine Pelagianism. Unlike the British cleric Pelagius, Augustine believed that humans were sinful creatures by their very nature and were incapable of living a sinless life not matter how hard they tried. The reason was the concept of an "original" sin, already mentioned by Paul. According to Augustine, each human inherits the stain of the original sin of Adam, committed when he disobeyed God. This inheritance is achieved through the act of sexual intercourse, which always occurs in the context of sinful lust. Extract from: Austin Cline, 'Biography: Augustine/Aurelius', in *About Agnosticism/Atheism* <http://atheism.about.com/library/glossary/western/bldef_augustine.htm> [accessed 28 May 2004].

¹⁰² Shahar, p.15; Heywood, pp. 14-15.

¹⁰³ Shahar, p. 15.

¹⁰⁴ *St. Augustine: On Education*, ed. by George Howie (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1969). Howie works mainly from F. J. Sheed, *The Confessions* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1945); D. M. Robertson, *St. Augustine: On Christian Doctrine* (New York: Liberal Arts, 1958); W. Oates, *Basic Writings of St. Augustine*, 2 vols (New York: Random House, 1948) and makes extra reference to *Library of Christian Classics*, ed. by J. H. S. Burleigh (London: S. C. M. Press, 1953-55) and *The Authentic*

Of learning during childhood, Augustine bases his thought on his own experiences and on what he observes in other children. Writing specifically on how he learned to speak, he says that:

Adults did not teach me by any well-defined sequence of instruction like the way in which I was taught letters at a later stage. The truth is that, striving with cries and various sounds [...], I did not always succeed in expressing what I wanted to say to the people to whom I wanted to say it. [...] As I repeatedly heard the same words properly used in various sentences, I gradually understood what they signified. Accordingly I brought my mouth to utter the same sounds and began to use them to express my own wishes.¹⁰⁵

Speaking of his adolescence, he talks uncomfortably of the drives he experienced during this time:

In the time of adolescence I burned with the desire to get my fill of hell, and with heedless folly I luxuriated in a variety of murky lusts. My "beauty consumed away" (Psalms 38,12) and I became rotten in Your eyes. Yet all the time I was pleasing to myself and was anxious to be pleasing in the eyes of my fellow man. All that mattered to me was to love and to be loved. But I knew no moderation in the meeting of mind at the point where the bright-shining boundary of friendship is placed. From the muddy desire of the flesh and from the hot, bubbling passions of adolescence, mists rose up to cloud over and darken my heart, so that the serene illumination of love could not be seen apart from the dark fog of lust.¹⁰⁶

In addition, Augustine also looks at how learning in childhood may affect our perception and understanding of things. He argues that the roots of *learning to understand* lie in the correct perception of worldly objects:

Learning begins with sense perception, that is, with "the rational knowledge of temporal things." But it must rise up to the higher intellectual level, that is, to "the intellectual knowledge of eternal things". It is on this level that absolute truth is to be found by the effort of pure thought. It is the function of the curriculum of the liberal arts to set the intelligence of the learner free by leading him gradually from concentration on sense experience to purely intellectual inquiry.¹⁰⁷

Augustine also affirms what has already been touched upon, that the sense of sight is fundamental in learning to perceive and understand, almost as if *seeing* equates to the basis of *understanding*:

Vision is the understanding which belongs to the soul; it is achieved by the combination of the sense of sight and the sensible object. If either is taken away, nothing can be seen.¹⁰⁸

Writings of the Fathers of the Church, ed. by R. D. Deferrari (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, [n.d.]).

¹⁰⁵ *Augustine*, ed. by Howie, pp. 32-33.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 204-05.

However, whilst the sense of sight forms the basis of understanding, full understanding is only possible through the medium of experience or *reason*:

Now the life of reason passes judgment, not only in sense data, but on the senses themselves; for example, reason knows why an oar dipped in water must appear crooked when in fact it is straight, and why it must seem crooked to the eyes. Eyesight can merely report a fact; it is unable to make judgments about it. Thus, it is clear that, as the life of sense perception is superior to the body, so the life of reason is superior to both.¹⁰⁹

Augustine, as well as Aristotle, is particularly credited with having been responsible for the medieval tradition of dividing childhood into three stages¹¹⁰.

1. *infantia*- from birth to 7 years- the age of 7 being the 'age of reason', when children were considered to be fully in possession of the faculty of reason and thus, able to make judgements based on experience. They would also have been thought old enough to leave the maternal shelter.¹¹¹
2. *pueritia*- from 7 to 12 years (for girls) or 14 years (for boys).
3. *adolescencia*- from 12 (girls) or 14 years (boys) to 21 years.

Some sources give a more complex, multi-staged version of this, suggesting an even more gradual development during childhood; for example, Heywood tells us that a twelfth-century translation of Avicenna's¹¹² *Canon* subdivided the stages of life from birth to 30 into five parts.¹¹³ However the three-stage version is enough to at least prove an *awareness* of a gradual development in growth throughout childhood¹¹⁴, as this is the model that appeared in the important work of Bartholomaeus Anglicus¹¹⁵, although he went a stage further in his recognition of

¹⁰⁹ Augustine, p. 219.

¹¹⁰ Heywood, p. 14; see also Edward James, 'Childhood and Youth in the Early Middle Ages', in *Youth in the Middle Ages*, ed. by P. J. P. Goldberg and Felicity Riddy (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2004), pp. 11-23, who, whilst acknowledging its existence, tries to discredit the widespread nature of this theory through the work of Gregory of Tours. Importantly, as it proves their influence in the Middle Ages, both (though, most particularly, Aristotle) are accredited for their part in this by Bartholomaeus Anglicus (to whom I shall shortly return) in his *On the Properties of Things*, trans. by John Trevisa, ed. by M. C. Seymour et al., 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), I, pp. 293-303.

¹¹¹ Heywood, p. 84.

¹¹² I shall return to Avicenna in greater detail later on.

¹¹³ Heywood, p. 14.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 14-16.

¹¹⁵ "Franciscan encyclopaedist of the thirteenth century, author of *De proprietatibus rerum*, written around 1225-1230 and first published in 1470 [suggesting the extent of the work's continued influence], the first important encyclopaedia of the Middle Ages. It detailed classical thought and theory on natural history." Extract from: John M. Lenhart, 'Bartholomaeus Anglicus', in *Catholic*

the fact that there were two sub-stages in the stage of *infantia*- from birth to 2 years and from 2 to 7 years. Shahar discusses this in her in-depth description of which characteristics were considered representative of each of the above stages, which I have attempted to reproduce in tabular form here:

<i>INFANTIA</i> (BIRTH-7)		<i>PUERITIA</i> (7-12 (girls)/14 (boys))	<i>ADOLESCENTIA</i> (12/14-21)
0-2	In need of constant maternal attention. Reliance on instinctual drives for food etc. Precedes language and thought.	Age of reason. Child capable of making reasoned judgements and choices. Ability to distinguish between good and evil. Better understanding of the significance of responsibilities, particularly one's responsibility to God, as child is now capable of sin.	Intensification of predilection to sin. Receptive to influences- such as educators and religion. Further development of power of judgement. Able to take full responsibility for actions.
2-7	Covetousness, particularly of objects- no sense of ownership. Demanding nature. Able to perceive, but unable to reason. Develops initial sense of identity. Full set of teeth= able to begin communicating effectively. Able to begin creating new social relationships. Recognition of parental authority.	Ability to discriminate. Susceptible to impudence, envy, impatience and impulsiveness. Full sense of one's name and its significance to identity. Recognition of authority other than parental.	Full formation of personality and knowledge of identity. Ability to perceive and to understand significance of particular symbols and objects.

Fig. 1: Characteristics of sub-stages of childhood¹¹⁶

The question here is, is it possible to map the *vaslez* against the information in this table? Interestingly, there is an initial suggestion that this might be possible. Our first experience of him in the forest gives us the image of a boy fascinated by objects

Encyclopedia <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02313b.htm>> [accessed 28 May 2004]. For this particular model see Bartholomaeus Anglicus, I, pp. 291-93.

¹¹⁶ Information tabulated by myself from that given in Shahar, pp. 21-31.

and their names, entirely reliant on his mother's education, weak to instinctive urges, and who has a tendency to lean towards the all too literal interpretation of the things he perceives. If we look at the stage of *infantia*, it is clear that the boy entirely fits the period of birth to 2 years, in his reliance upon his mother and instinctual drives. However, the *vaslez* also displays some of the characteristics of a child aged 2-7, such as covetousness, the ability to perceive, but not to reason, and a demanding type of nature.

Thus, there is something of a crossover into the second stage of *infantia*: clearly, he does not conform entirely to one or the other of these sub-stages at the point when we meet him, which suggests that he is definable as perhaps being on the cusp of the second sub-stage of *infantia*. Indeed, at least theoretically, and at this stage, speculatively speaking, he can thus be assigned a mental age of approximately two, which does conform to what was earlier suggested, that even from a modern perspective, this *vaslez* may be someone displaying the character of a child of toddling age.

Faculty Psychology

But of course, the question of perception has to do not just with surveys of childhood, but also with the psychology of perception as understood in medieval conceptions of imagination and faculty psychology. The most common theories of imagination are to be found in the so-called faculty psychologies, wherein each mental power is assigned to its proper cell or ventricle in the head according to its function in an orderly progress of cognition from the first sensation to the idea.¹¹⁷ We can know just how important the idea of faculty psychology was by the vast body of material written on it, and we can also know that the medieval audience may

¹¹⁷ Murray Wright Bundy, *The Theory of Imagination in Classical and Mediaeval Thought* (Folcroft, PA: Folcroft Library Editions, 1976), p. 179; see also G. S. Brett, *A History of Psychology*, 3 vols (London: G. Allen, 1912-21), II, pp. 71-81. V. A. Kolve's introduction to his *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: The First Five Canterbury Tales*, pp. 9-58, gives a pleasingly succinct and intelligible account, but I shall return to this in more detail shortly.

have had a fair idea, if not a solid knowledge of faculty psychology, as can be confirmed by its appearance in Bartholomaeus' influential encyclopaedia:

The innere witte is departid apre by þre regiouns of þe brayn, for in þe brayn beþ þre smale celles. Þe formest hatte *ymaginatiua*, þerin þingis þat þe vttir witte apprehendiþ withoute beþ i-ordeyned and i put togedres withinne [...] Þe middil chambre hatte *logica* þerin þe vertu estimatiue is maister. Þe þridde and þe laste is *memoratiua*, þe vertu of mynde.¹¹⁸

Theorists¹¹⁹ tell us that much of medieval faculty psychology begins with Avicenna¹²⁰, who essentially, like Aristotle¹²¹, held that the heart took a position of absolute primacy in matters of the body, however he disagreed that the sensitive faculties were actually located in that organ. Rather he suggested in his *Canon of Medicine*¹²² that whilst it was arguable that the heart could still be the principle of sensation, it could no longer be held to house the common sense.¹²³ He holds that, just as there are five outward senses, there are also five inward wits. Initially, perception and cognition begin in the outer senses, and then this information is passed to the front ventricle of the brain where *sensus communis* resides. This is effectively a clearinghouse¹²⁴ for all the sensations, and thus it does not retain the sensation long. Instead it passes the sensible forms to *imaginatio*, which is also located in the front ventricle of the brain. This receives and retains the sensible forms- whilst *sensus communis* cannot retain a form without perceiving it, *imaginatio* stores it up like a kind of memory. Avicenna then houses two powers in the middle ventricle: *vis extimativa* and *via imaginativa* (also known as *vis*

¹¹⁸ Bartholomaeus Anglicus, I, p. 98.

¹¹⁹ See Bundy, p. 178 and pp. 182-83; but for an admirably lucid description of Avicenna's theories, see E. Ruth Harvey, *The Inward Wits: Psychological Theory in the Middle Age and the Renaissance* (London: Warburg Institute, University of London, 1975), pp. 21-53. It is mainly Harvey's description that I shall be drawing upon in my own description of Avicenna's theories.

¹²⁰ 'Avicenna (980-1037) is the Latin name of the Persian Husain ibn Abdull h ibn 'Al ibn S n , called the 'Chief Master' and the 'Second Teacher' after Aristotle. He was learned both as a doctor and as a philosopher, and he left an enormous body of writings. In the West he was famed chiefly for the large *Canon of Medicine* (*Q n n f al-Tibb*) [...] and as the author of a poem on medicine, the *Cantica Avicennae*. [...] His philosophical encyclopedia *al-Shif '* was partly translated into Latin by Gundissalinus during the twelfth century; an elaborate philosophical description of the inward wits is found in the part of the work called *De Anima* or *VI Naturalium*.' Harvey, p. 21.

¹²¹ Confirmed by Everson, p. 141.

¹²² The edition I used for confirmatory reference is Avicenna, *al-Q'an-un f'i al-tibb: A treatise on the Canon of medicine of Avicenna incorporating a translation of the first book*, ed. by O. Cameron Gruner (London: Luzac, 1930).

¹²³ Harvey, p. 39.

¹²⁴ Ibid, p. 43.

cogitativa). The latter of these two is capable of creating imaginary images from things we have perceived previously. For example, we understand the meanings of ‘flying’ and ‘a man’, and whilst we know that a combination of these cannot truly exist, we can nevertheless imagine the form of a ‘flying man’. It effectively works on the material stored in *imaginatio* and joins and divides forms to make a new one. *Extimativa* can be described as a kind of natural instinct, as it apprehends things which are not necessarily perceived by the senses, for example, a baby automatically knows how to suck and a sheep knows that the wolf is to be avoided, even if it has never before seen a wolf- these are known as *intentiones*. Situated in the rearmost ventricle is *memoralis* which is to *extimativa* what *imaginatio* is to *sensus communis*: it retains the *intentiones* perceived by *extimativa*, just as *imaginatio* stores up the sensible forms perceived by *sensus communis*.

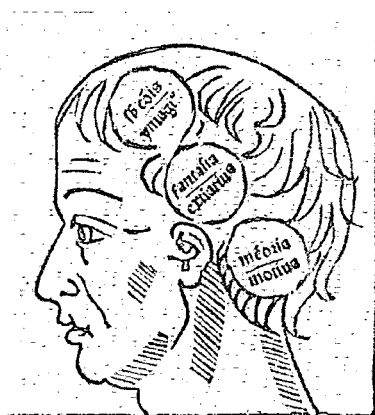


Fig. 2: Three-ventricle diagram of the brain, showing in which ventricles the faculties are located. Triumphus Augustinus de Anchona, *Opusculum perutile de cognitione animae*, rev. by Achillini (Bologna, 1503).¹²⁵

There is, however, no consistent medieval theory of imagination available to us.¹²⁶ Theorists have, nevertheless, made efforts to construct what one might describe as a ‘standard model’ of the medieval mind. Bundy bases his description mainly on Albertus Magnus’s¹²⁷ scheme as he considers that it ‘gathers together the greatest wealth of material’¹²⁸. Albertus tells us that the organs of apprehension are common

¹²⁵ Kolve, p. 25.

¹²⁶ Bundy, p. 177.

¹²⁷ Albertus Magnus (1206?-1280) was a scientist, philosopher and theologian who wrote, amongst many other works, *De Apprehensione*, a concise account of faculty psychology, see D. J. Kennedy, ‘Albertus Magnus’, in *Catholic Encyclopedia* <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01264a.htm>> [accessed 3 August 2004].

¹²⁸ Bundy, p. 187.

sense, imagination, opinion, phantasy and memory. Imagination is known as *virtus imaginativa* or *phantasia* because the forms impressed upon it are images of external objects and it has the power of retaining forms, devoid of matter, which have been apprehended by common sense. Then comes the faculty of opinions or *aestimativa*, which, as with Avicenna's scheme, seeks out the *intentiones*. 'Opinion' differs from 'imagination' as it is capable of resulting in joy or sadness- it impels to action where imagination acts merely as a mirror for sensory images. Then there is 'phantasy', which has the power to compare, unite or divide- it can compare image with image, *intentiones* with *intentiones* and even image with *intentiones*. It is both a kind of reason and the unifying principle of all the apprehensive powers. Following this is memory. It is the preserver of the *intentiones* that opinion apprehends, just as imagination is the preserver of impressions. Imagination and memory do not differ except in respect to their objects.¹²⁹

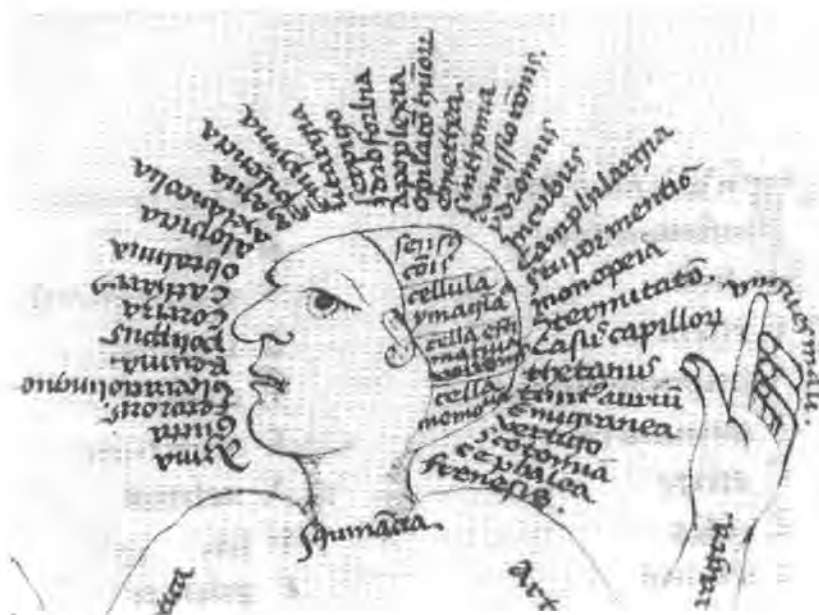


Fig. 3: Brain diagram (a 'disease' man) which shows the location of the faculties according to Avicenna's scheme. Paris, ca. 1400.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ Paraphrased from Bundy, p. 187-92. Albertus's theory of 'memory' is not something that I, for the purposes of this analysis, shall go into at any depth, as his main concern was the artificiality of memory, that is, memory 'found artificially though subtlety of mind'. This is not something that we need concern ourselves with as we are more interested with the function and development of 'natural memory'. For a full and illuminating discussion of the significance of memory in the Middle Ages, see Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), pp. 50-104.

¹³⁰ From Paris, Bibl. Natl. MS. lat. 11229, fol. 37v (Paris, ca. 1400), in Kolve, p. 24.

Kolve, too, attempts a summary of the medieval concept of the mind¹³¹, having usefully analysed some aspects of medieval faculty psychology to explain Chaucer's use of narrative imagery. Whilst Kolve does look at Avicenna's theory¹³², he works on the fundamental premise that medieval literature aims to offer an experience that is, in some sense, 'visual', and to prove this, he chooses to favour Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*¹³³, which Chaucer translated into prose and used pervasively in his poetic fictions.¹³⁴

Kolve tells us that medieval faculty psychology essentially explains our ability to remember in terms of a 'cellular model of the human brain that varied to some degree across the centuries, and from writer to writer'.¹³⁵ He works initially, as I have already mentioned, from Boethius (whom he then relates to other theorists of the time and creates an interwoven and coherent version of the theory), who tries to explain how man's free will and God's foreknowledge can coexist, since either term would seem to rule out the possibility of the other. Boethius suggests that the solution to the problem lies in making proper distinctions between ways of knowing, and knowing is actualised by our *wits*: the five outer senses, which is the first faculty in the *hierarchy of faculties*.¹³⁶ These *wits* tell us about phenomena in their material form: e.g. the touch, taste, smell, sight and sound of an object. Once we have seen an object, we can then progress to the next faculty in the hierarchy: *ymaginacioun*¹³⁷

¹³¹ Kolve, pp. 9-58.

¹³² Ibid, pp. 22-23.

¹³³ "Roman statesman and philosopher, often styled "the last of the Romans", regarded by tradition as a Christian martyr, born at Rome in 480; died at Pavia in 524 or 525. Descended from a consular family, he was left an orphan at an early age and was educated by the pious and noble-minded Symmachus, whose daughter, Rusticana, he married. As early as 507 he was known as a learned man, and thus enjoyed the confidence of the king. When accused of sacrilege, he was cast into prison, condemned unheard, and executed. During his imprisonment, he reflected on the instability of the favour of princes and the inconstancy of the devotion of his friends. These reflections suggested to him the theme of his best-known philosophical work, the *De Consolatione Philosophiae*." Extract from: William Turner, 'Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius', in *Catholic Encyclopedia* <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02610b.htm>> [accessed 28 May 2004]. A particularly coherent translation is that by V. E. Watts, *The Consolation of Philosophy* (London: Penguin, 1969).

¹³⁴ Kolve, pp. 20-21.

¹³⁵ Ibid, p. 22.

¹³⁶ Boethius, trans. by Watts, pp. 99-104.

¹³⁷ My use of Old English orthography is due to Kolve's terminology, and he, of course, is using these as they are what Chaucer used in his translation of Boethius, however, from here on I shall use modern English spelling when referring to these terms.

(*imagination*) and thus recall the object, and also divorce it from matter and invent an image of the object that we have never known. Higher still is the faculty of *resoun* (*reason*) which is capable of relating the object, divorced from matter, to all associated objects, conceiving the universal class of which it is a species. The fourth way of knowing is possessed only by divine Providence, whose unique faculty—called *intelligence* (*intelligence*)—knows a thing not only exists within the world of matter, and as image, and as universal class, but also, that a thing exists in perpetuity within the divine thought, e.g. an object which exists in advance of, and will endure beyond, the material creation¹³⁸.

In this hierarchy of faculties, each power comprehends all that is proper to the power(s) below it, but the lower has no access to anything higher.¹³⁹

In this way, the constructed image was held to be superior to the reproduced image as the constructive power was considered able to transcend not only sense experience, but also the particular mental images by which it enters the memory.¹⁴⁰

It is largely from this model of faculty psychology that I will work. Firstly, it is clear and concise, as he has taken into account the vast body of material on the subject and created a model which incorporates aspects of most of the other theories (importantly, taking into account those theories of less learned circles, rather than simply those of the philosophers), as well as the one he most favours. Secondly, even more so than the other theories of childhood that have been examined, this ‘hierarchy of faculties’ can be applied quite strikingly to our infantile image of the *vaslez* in the *Conte*. In the initial scene, the *vaslez* seems capable only of perceiving objects; he cannot yet internalise those perceptions, reflect on them and fully understand their significance, thus his behaviour is reminiscent of the first faculty of the *wits* or *sensus communis*, whereby one simply perceives an object via the senses. The question is, will the successive powers in this particular hierarchy of faculties also find themselves represented in the progression of the *vaslez*? Indeed, can the

¹³⁸ This description of the faculties is effectively a reworking of Boethius, pp. 155-69, however I also found illuminating and make use of Kolve’s version of Boethius’ theories (pp. 20-22) as it made excellent use of more modern analogies.

¹³⁹ Kolve, p. 20-21.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 27.

same be said of the other the other cited medieval theories of childhood? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to analyse the remaining chosen scenes under the light of these theories and to consider the actual extent of their impact on Chrétien's work.

Chapter 3: The Tent Scene (vv. 635-780)

So to a scene that some claim shows no particular development in the *vaslez*'s maturation¹⁴¹, whereas others cannot help but notice its implied significance¹⁴², as will now be discussed. After the scene with the knights' armour, the *vaslez* returns home to his mother and informs her of his intention to leave his maternal home and go to Arthur to acquire arms. His mother is distraught, as she has already lost her husband and two elder sons to chivalry. She tells her son that this is why she has shielded him from the real world and implores him not to go. Eventually, she realises he cannot be swayed from his decision and tries instead to offer him some advice for his coming adventure:

Se vos trovez ne pres ne loing
Dame qui d'aïe et besoing,
Ne pucele desconseilliee,
La vostre aïe apareilliee
Lor soit, s'eles vos an requierent,
Que totes enors i afierent.
Qui as dames enor ne porte,
La soe enors doit estre morte.
Dames et puceles servez,
Si seroiz par tot enorez;
Et se vos aucune an proiez,
Gardez que ne li despleise.
De pucele a mout qui la beise;
S'ele le beisier vos consant,
Lc soreplus vos an desfant,
Se leissier le volez por moi.
Et s'ele a anel an son doi
Ou a sa ceinture aumosniere,

¹⁴¹ Roger S. Loomis, 'The Grail Story of Chrétien de Troyes as Ritual and Symbolism', *PMLA*, 71 (1956), 842-52 (p. 843), Loomis suggests that the scene is farcical and that it is only after the scene with Blanchefleur that Perceval actually makes any real progress. Busby suggests that Perceval takes much the same *nice* approach to the situation as he did in the previous scene, pp. 20-21.

¹⁴² Peggy McCracken, 'The Poetics of Sacrifice: Allegory and Myth in the Grail Quest', *Yale French Studies*, 95 (1999), 152-68 (p. 158), McCracken says that the scene prepares the knight's initiation into the chivalric brotherhood and his integration into the court; Topsfield sees the scene as a foreshadowing of when Perceval turns his attentions to food rather than the mysterious object that is the Grail in the coming scene in the Grail Castle, p. 236; Rosemarie Deist suggests that Perceval's actions show that he is no longer the innocent he once was in his mother's forest in her 'Perceval's Inner Wanderings: Growing Out of Childhood in Chrétien de Troyes's *Conte du Graal*', in *The Court Reconvenes: International Courtly Literature Society 1998*, ed. by Barbara K. Altman and Carleton W. Carroll (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2003), pp. 223-29 (p. 226).

Se par amor ou par proiere
 Le vos done, bon m'iert et bel
 Que voz an portoiz son anel:
 De l'anel prandre vos doing gié
 Et de l'aumonosiére congié.
 Biaux filz, ancor vos vuel dire el:
 Ja an chemin ne an ostel
 N'aiiez longuemant conpeignon
 Que vos ne demandiez son non;
 Le non sachiez a la parsome,
 Car par le non conoist l'an l'ome.
 Biaux filz, as prodomes parlez,
 Avuec les prodomes alez:
 Prodon ne forsconsoille mie
 Çaus qui tienent sa conpeignie.
 Sor tote rien vos vuel proier
 Que an yglise et an mostier
 Alez proier nostre Seignor,
 Qu'an c'est siecle vos doint contenire
 Qu'a bone fin puissiez venir. (vv. 533-72)¹⁴³

He then departs and looks back to see his mother in a faint on her doorstep, but he does not return to see if she is well. When he awakes the following morning, the text states he "S'a au chevauchier antandu/ *Tant* que il vit un tref" (vv. 637-38, my emphasis), implying that he is set on the purpose for his journey (which is to acquire arms from Arthur), but at the mere *sight* of the tent, he is suddenly very easily distracted him from his purpose of acquiring arms. Chrétien describes the tent to us in great detail, precisely, it is arguable, as the *vaslez* sees it before him, paying attention to all its sumptuous detail:

Li trez fu *biaus* a grant mervoille;
 L'une partie fu vermoille
 Et l'autre verz, d'orfrois bandee;
 Desus ot une aigle doree;
 An l'aigle feroit li solauz,
 Qui mout luisoit clers et vermauz,
 Si reluisoient tuit li pré
 De l'anluminement del tré.
 Antor le tref a la reonde,
 Qui estoit li plus *biaus* del monde,
 Avoit deus ramees fuilliees
 Et loges galesches dresciees. (vv. 641-52, my emphasis)

¹⁴³ I quote at such length as the mother's advice is crucial to the analysis that now follows, and I shall be referring back to it at frequent intervals.

Particularly significant here are the particular colours and symbols in Chrétien's description. We have already established that colours and shininess are appealing to the *vaslez*, so it is no surprise that he is distracted by it. In Medieval times, colours sometimes bore specific significances, particularly in knightly circles, and they were used as an outward sign of a knight's characteristics. Here the colours are red, green and a rich gold embroidery. Red was known to signify magnanimity and military strength, whilst green represented loyalty in love¹⁴⁴, both of which correspond very nicely to the tent's inhabitants- a strong knight and his maiden, both preoccupied with fidelity in love¹⁴⁵. Huchet, whilst not explaining its significance, does notice the overwhelming recurrence of the colour red throughout the text. In speaking of the scene with the knights' armour, he says:

Les même couleurs rutilent sur le «tref» de la demoiselle endormie. [...] L'éclat meurtrier du vermeil brille aussi sur l'armure du chevalier tué d'un javelot dans l'œil, contre toute chevalerie. Vermeil encore du sang sur le lys des joues de Blancheflor (v. 1824-1825), ou dégouttant de la blanche lance, [...], l'instant des gouttes du sang sur la neige (v. 4426-2249).¹⁴⁶

The *shining* gold of the tent would have been considered the noblest colour, as it was equated with Sunday and with the Sun, corresponding with the virtues of richness and noblesse¹⁴⁷. This fact is very interesting, when combined with the symbolism implied by the eagle atop the tent, reflecting the sun's rays so powerfully, because it seems that:

The Eagle is mainly a solar symbol, associated with Zeus and in Roman times with military prowess and Imperium. In Christian times it became associated with St John, for one of the beasts around the throne of God was like a flying eagle. Charlemagne adopted it as a symbol of his position as Holy Roman Emperor and thus it has often been used by Princes and States, particularly in Flemish regions.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ *Symbols on Coats of Arms and Family Crests*, <<http://www.oshel.com/symbols.htm>> [accessed 12 December 2003], (table 1).

¹⁴⁵ As we shall see, the maiden is determined to stay loyal to her lover, and the knight goes to great extremes to express his dissatisfaction with his lover's supposed infidelity.

¹⁴⁶ Jean-Charles Huchet, 'Le nom et l'image', in *Essais de clinique littéraire du texte médiéval* (Orléans: Paradigme, 1998), pp. 49-70 (pp. 66-67).

¹⁴⁷ *Armorial Bearings of Findlater*, <<http://www.findlater.org.uk/Arms.htm>> [accessed 12 December 2003], (para. 5 of 6).

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

So it seems a particularly telling symbol considering Chrétien's connection to Flanders, and the fact that the story was first composed for the Flemish court. Whether or not these colours and imagery symbolise a particular person is difficult to say, as it has proved impossible to find a connected figure of the time whose arms correspond with this.¹⁴⁹ Count Philip's arms seemed the obvious place to start, but they too bore no resemblance. Nevertheless, it may be that these colours did mean something to a medieval Flemish audience, if they do not to us today, constituting a sort of knowing wink to the audience, but if there is a personage linked to these colours, their identity will have to remain a mystery for the present. In addition, it is important to notice the ecclesiastical association with St. John, and link that (at the very basic level that it is of religious significance) with the *vaslez*'s coming inference that the tent is a church. Perhaps he is not so ignorant as one might initially assume, particularly if one remarks upon the inclusion of orphrey, which is defined as "a richly embroidered band or border, esp. on an ecclesiastical vestment".¹⁵⁰ So there again we see a reference to something which is mildly reminiscent of that which one might find in a church- is it this that leads the *vaslez* to his conclusion? At first glance, one might see the logic in this, but as we shall now see, this is not his reason at all.

Immediately that we have heard the description, the *vaslez* says:

«Deus! Or voi je vostre meison!
 Or feroie je mesprison,
 Se aorer ne vos aloie.
 Voir dist ma mere tote voie,
 Qui me dist que mostiers estoit
 La plus *bele chose* qui soit,
 Et me dist que ja ne trovasse
 Mostier qu'aorer n'i alasse
 Le Criator, an cui je croi.
 Je l'irai proier, par ma foi,

¹⁴⁹ Despite extensive internet research, no relevant coats of arms matched the colours found here (e.g. Marie de Champagne, Troyes or Philippe of Flanders), for further information, see *The Heraldry Society*, <www.theheraldrysociety.com> [accessed 14 January 2004] and *Civic Heraldry of England, Wales and Europe*, <www.civicheraldry.co.uk> [accessed 14 January 2004].

¹⁵⁰ 'Orphrey', in *World Reference*, <<http://www.wordreference.com/english/definition.asp?en=orphrey>> [accessed 12 December 2003], (para. 1 of 1).

Qu'il me doint ancui a mangier,
Que j'an avroie grant mestier.» (vv. 655-66, my emphasis)

The *vaslez* sees the *biaus* (v. 641) object and makes the direct association between that word and the word that his mother used to describe a church ('bele', v. 578), and thus believes the beautiful object to be a church. This is, of course, another false syllogism, very similar to the one he made in mistaking the knights for both devils and angels. The difference here is that he, for the first time, seems able to recall certain things: he remembers that when he previously saw the knights, he assigned the word *biauté* to them, where *biauté* was defined by him as being made up of bright, glittering colours. He is now, once again, seeing shining, glimmering colours, and so he once again applies the term *biauté* to the situation. It is from this that he moves on to attempt to actually identify the object before him. If this object is something which he deems to have *biauté*, then it must be a *bel* building, which is how his mother says he will be able to recognise a church. However, despite his clear attempt to make connections and thus this identification, his actual conclusion is ultimately wrong.

In addition, we see the *vaslez*'s personal perception of the tent via the medium of direct speech, or soliloquy, and Chrétien is creating this viewpoint precisely so the listener can make sense of the character. Point-of-view seems to be of particular importance in the *Conte*. By conveying what the *vaslez* sees directly from his point-of-view, Chrétien places us undeniably in the *vaslez*'s world and we can then see the things as he sees them. And, as we have noticed, Chrétien also shows the *vaslez*'s perceptions by taking the stance of the omniscient narrator, telling us what it is that is actually being seen from an exterior or objective point-of-view, as in the initial description of the *tref* where we are told in no uncertain terms that this *is* a tent, only to watch the *vaslez* decide it is a church. This again offers us a vital insight into our character. This point-of-view narrative (that is, the *vaslez*'s point-of-view) occurs quite frequently and indeed, Cazelles maintains that we always see events and objects through Perceval's eyes¹⁵¹ - however, whilst this is quite often true,

¹⁵¹ Cazelles, p. 206.

Cazelles's comment is actually something of an over-simplification. In this passage, surely, as I have shown, the listener/reader is, more precisely, in the position that Lacy suggests:

There are times when we do have knowledge denied to [the *vaslez*]. Indeed Chrétien *must* make privileged observers of us if his comic and ironic view of his hero is to be effectively communicated, for that view depends on us knowing considerably more than the character does.¹⁵²

Here, in other words, irony depends on our recognising the extent of the *vaslez*'s misunderstanding of what he sees: Chrétien, our omniscient narrator (and importantly, not the *vaslez*) has told us, firmly, that this is a *tref*, and so our enjoyment comes from our amusement at seeing the *vaslez* then go on to misinterpret the building that he sees, in ways which are profoundly ironic.

His mistaking the tent for a church can also be seen as representative of the *vaslez*'s blurred distinction between religion and chivalry, given that he has not really received any in-depth education on either. As Cazelles puts it:

That he mistakes a pavilion for a church contributes to Chrétien's humorous portrayal of Perceval as *niche*. Perceval's confusion also reveals the existence of a disturbing resemblance between a typically secular site, the courtly pavilion, and a typically religious site, a consecrated church. If pavilions and churches look alike to Perceval it is because he has never before seen either type of edifice.¹⁵³

That Cazelles describes this blurred distinction between the objects as 'disturbing' is interesting, because it may not seem all that disturbing to the modern reader; but to the medieval reader, this would have been quite unnerving as strict distinctions were drawn between the chivalric and religious worlds. Indeed the values of one of these worlds may have been seen as the practical antithesis of the other's.¹⁵⁴ Thus, by using such a striking contrast in his choice of objects for the *vaslez* to confuse with each other, Chrétien places particular emphasis on the importance of objects within the *Conte*, and more importantly, within the development of the *vaslez*.

¹⁵² Lacy, p. 61.

¹⁵³ Cazelles, p. 206.

¹⁵⁴ See Lacy, p. 17; Topsfield, p. 257-59. For a full discussion of chivalry versus religion, see Christopher M. Bellitto, 'Chivalry: A Door to Teaching the Middle Ages', *The History Teacher*, 28 (1995), 479-85 and C. J. Tyerman, 'Were There Any Crusades in the Twelfth Century?', *The English Historical Review*, 110 (1995), 553-77.

It is interesting, too, that the *vaslez* should describe a church as God's *meison*¹⁵⁵ (v. 655), for this is precisely what his mother had described it as being several lines earlier: "Une meison bele et saintisme" (v. 578). Of course, were it another character calling something "God's house", we would have a clear understanding that this is meant as a metaphorical construction, i.e. the character would realise that God does not actually live in the house, rather it is something, which belongs to him in an abstract way. However, this being the *vaslez*, we find that his perception of objects, as we have seen, is rather more literal, so when he says "«Deus! Or voi je vostre meison!" one must question whether he means the term literally, and thus consequently, whether he actually expects to find God inside, rather than understanding it in the sense that we assume his mother must have meant it. Hanning concurs with this point, telling us that "the expectation engendered by the hero by this broad term *maison* is that of a private dwelling."¹⁵⁶ Indeed, the word *meison* is used repetitively throughout the text, (by other characters as well as merely his mother) to describe various objects, such as a church (v. 578, 653), his mother's house (v. 727), the fisherman's house (v. 3033) and the regal seat of the Roi Pêcheur (v. 3532), the majority of which are private dwellings. In fact, the only one of these constructions which is not a private dwelling is the church, and it is only described so in two instances: firstly by the mother, who we assume actually understands the metaphorical construction, and secondly, by the *vaslez*, who does not actually know what the construction is. So if a *meison* is a private dwelling, then we are sensitised to the fact that the *vaslez* believes it entirely possible that God should live literally and materially on earth. In this respect, he seems, most crucially, to take the human for the divine, a point which will meet its ultimate antithesis at the Grail castle when the *vaslez* does precisely the opposite. This suggests that he is somehow confined to a literal level, being unable thus far to operate on the metaphorical, abstract level. Indeed we already have evidence of the aforementioned antithesis both in this scene

¹⁵⁵ Definitions of *maison* are defined in T-L, V, 890-95 as either *Haus/Wohnung, Festung, Gefängnis*, or *Kirche/Abtei/Kloster*, confirming the polyvalent nature of the word, and indeed, how easily it might be misconstrued by someone like the *vaslez*, as yet incapable of looking below the surface of objects.

¹⁵⁶ Robert W. Hanning, *The Individual in Twelfth-Century Romance* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), pp. 141-42.

and the previous scene, where he does in fact take the human for the divine, e.g. when he thinks he has seen God on earth when he initially meets the knights: “Estes vos Deus?” (v. 174), as well as when he says he will pray that God provide him with food (vv. 664-66), meaning physical nourishment rather than spiritual sustenance, which thus lends a bathetic effect to the passage. Busby suspects that this gluttonous request is fuelled by the *vaslez*’s:

self-interest, for whereas his mother has said that he should worship God and pray for an honourable life, Perceval wants God to send him something to eat.¹⁵⁷

I suggest that this is true, but in addition we can take the *vaslez*’s all too literal perception of objects to be at the root of the request, as well as simple self-interest. Even though his mother does not mention anything specific about ‘food’ in her words of advice, she does say ‘Alez proïier nostre Seignor’ (v. 570), which, we must assume, means that the *vaslez* knows what it is to pray. This being the case, it is likely he will have heard someone praying to God for ‘food’, though they, of course, will have meant it in the spiritual sense, whereas he would be unlikely to understand this metaphor, and would think them to mean actual, material food. So if what God provides are solid, material objects, then it is not entirely surprising that he might perceive God as a ‘solid, earthly being’ (as he does indeed seem to). Consequently it is also not surprising that the *vaslez* should expect to be provided with actual food on entering God’s *meison*. To the *vaslez*, God’s acts are thus ‘material’ and the idea of spirituality, and indeed, spiritual sustenance does not seem to even occur to the *vaslez*. The *vaslez*’s literal take on all objects works in both ways then, where he confuses not only what is divine with what is human, but also vice versa, which in turn recalls his initial encounter with the knights, where he thinks they are devils (which as the reader knows, are supernatural beings) but refuses to cross himself, and naïvely believes that human violence will be enough to overcome them (vv. 113-24).

Continuing this theme of miscomprehension of spirituality, we also see here a foreshadowing of that which is to come, and that is the idea of a *need* for food. As

¹⁵⁷ Busby, p. 20.

we know, when the *vaslez* says that he will pray for some food “Que j’an avroie grant mestier,” (v. 666), he literally means bodily sustenance, rather than spiritual sustenance. This is also proven yet further by how heartily he gobbles down the pies later on in the scene, giving in so easily to his body’s natural urges: “Un des pastez devant lui froisse/ Et manjue par grand talent,” (vv. 746-47) as he has no comprehension of how one might be able to survive without actual food and solely on the sustenance of faith. This shows that, although he claims to have faith in God, he does not actually understand that faith. Conversely, the Roi Pêcheur’s father, as we come to see, manages to be sustained by a single host from the Grail and his faith. This in turn proves undeniably that the *vaslez* as yet has no true understanding of his faith- he understands only that his mother has told him that he should worship the ‘Creator in whom he believes’ (vv. 658-63), though he, of course, does not comprehend the significance of this. He is unable to look beyond purely bodily needs, he does not yet know about penance and abstinence, and he is still attracted to items which, by comparison with faith, are worldly and essentially superfluous, such as pies, pretty tents, rings and armour.¹⁵⁸ His attraction to these objects, even though he has no idea of their actual significance, tells us that it is still primarily with surface appearance that he is preoccupied; indeed he seems incapable of looking below the surface in the pursuit of meaning. It is important in this scene, however, that he is trying to assign identity to these objects, even though he cannot yet be accurate, as we see with the object that is the tent itself.

The *vaslez* then enters the tent, and discovers a maiden sleeping on a bed. She wakes upon hearing him enter and he says:

«Pucele, je vos salu,
Si con ma mere le m’aprist:
Ma mere m’anseigna et dist
Que les puceles saluasse
An quel que leu que jes trouvasse.» (vv. 682-85)

¹⁵⁸ Leonardo Olschki, *The Grail Castle and its Mysteries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), pp. 18-19.

So, once again he resorts to relying on his mother's advice. The maiden looks and acts frightened by his presence, but he does not seem to notice this, saying instead that he should do as his mother told him and steal a kiss:

La pucele de peor tranble
Por le vaslet, qui fos li sanble,
Si se tient por fole provee
De ce qu'il l'a sole trovee.
«Vaslez, fet ele, tien ta voie!
Fui, que mes amis ne te voie!
-Einz vos beiserai, par mon chief,
Fez li vaslez, cui qu'il soit grief,
Que *ma mere* le m'anseigna.

(vv. 687-95, my emphasis)

This is, however, not exactly what his mother told him. She said that he should take a kiss *only* 's'ele le beisier vos consant' (v. 546). He has clearly misinterpreted (or perhaps selectively listened to) this advice and kisses her anyway, in spite of the maiden's protestations and weeping. Oddly, the *vaslez* notices nothing particularly unusual about the maiden's clearly distressed behaviour. Conversely, the maiden, too, misunderstands the *vaslez*'s behaviour. Cazelles makes the excellent point that:

His behaviour leads the Pavilion Damsel to assume that the uncouth adolescent has aggressive intentions. If this stranger does not follow the rules of the game, he must come as a "hunter" and view her as his "prey".¹⁵⁹

Cazelles's use of a hunting metaphor is very insightful, because, as we know, the *vaslez*, in his most natural state, actually *is* a hunter, so for him to behave this way is probably something entirely natural to him, even if it may seem strange to the audience, and, as we have seen before, it is not only the audience who find his behaviour strange and look for ways to explain it based on their own experience; the characters, too, do the same thing. For example, just as when the knights assume, in our initial scene, that the reason the *vaslez* throws himself to the floor is because he is frightened of them (when in fact it is because he believes he must worship them), here the tent maiden assumes that the *vaslez* must have aggressive intentions (when, in his mind, he has none whatsoever). This parallel miscomprehension of the other's

¹⁵⁹ Cazelles, p. 210.

intentions is particularly interesting because it once again raises the many issues surrounding perception such as those that we have already discussed.

The *vaslez* then goes ahead and kisses the maiden against her will, and is quite vigorous in his actions (see italicised words below), distracted only by the *sight* of her pretty emerald ring:

Li vaslez avoit les bras *forz*,
Si l'anbrace mout *nicemant*,
Car il nel sot feire autremant:
Mist la soz lui tote estandue,
Et cele s'est mout desfandue
Et deganchi quanqu'ele pot;
Mes desfanse mestier n'i ot,
Que li vaslez an un randon.
La beisa, *volsist'ele ou non*,
Vint foiz, si con li contes dit,
Tant qu'un anel an son doi *vit*
A une esmeraude mout clere.

(vv. 700-11, my emphasis)

Pickens blames the mother's precepts and concepts entirely for what the *vaslez* does to the Tent Maiden¹⁶⁰, but by saying this, he neglects to notice the fact that the *vaslez*, here, is not actually following his mother's instructions to the letter. As we have seen, in line 547 his mother clearly told him that he should only kiss a maiden 'S'ele le beisier vos consant'. So rather than following her precise instructions, he seems to have developed a kind of selective hearing, taking exactly what he wants from her words and using them to justify his actions. The text itself tells us that the *vaslez* behaves in this manner "Car il nel sot feire autrement" (v. 702), as it is what his mother has told him; he has no other experience other than her teachings. And indeed, as I have said, it is only the *sight* of her ring (another shiny, attractive object), which halts his rigorous kissing escapade, as it reminds him of yet another piece of his mother's advice:

Et s'ele a anel an son doi
Ou a sa ceinture aumosniere,
Se par amor ou par proiere
Le vos done, *bon m'iert et bel*
Que voz an portoiz son anel:

¹⁶⁰ Pickens, *The Welsh Knight*, p. 24.

De l'anel prandre vos doing gié
Et de l'aumosniere congié.

(vv. 550-57, my emphasis)

Similar to the kiss, here, his mother has effectively given him *permission* to commit the act of taking the ring (v. 553, italicised) and thus he makes no apology for his actions, even though he has wronged a lady. In one way he has, unwittingly, gone against his mother's advice that he values so highly as the maiden is precisely the sort of damsel in distress that his mother has suggested he make efforts to rescue ('pucele desconseillie' v. 535)¹⁶¹. However we might see in another sense that it is rather a misinterpretation of the words rather than an active choice. He has understood that his mother has given him permission to do this, but he does not appear to have understood the fact that the maiden, too, must give her permission (v. 553, non-italicised). This suggests that he may only recognise his mother's authority; she has, after all, been his sole informant, and this characteristic of recognising only parental authority is something clearly defined as infantile in our table of childhood (cf. p. 50).

The *vaslez*, having taken the things he wants, suddenly realises he is hungry, and without a thought for the maiden, immediately *looks* for something to satisfy his hunger:

Li vaslez a son cuer ne met
Rien nule de ce que il ot,
Mais de ce que geüné ot
Moroit de fain a male fin.
Un bocel trueve plain de vin
Et un hanap d'arjant selonc,
Et voit sor un trossel de jonc
Une toaille blanche et nueve.
Il la sozlieve et desoz trueve
Trois bons pasteiz de chevrel fres:

(vv. 734-43, my emphasis)

Again, we see he is only interested in satisfying his own hunger; he has no concern for anyone else. Once he finds some food, he simply takes it without asking, which is a rather infantile action, though as we remember, he thought he was entering a church where God would provide him with some 'food', so perhaps he believes this food has been provided by God and thus, rightfully his. It is noteworthy that here

¹⁶¹ Schwartz, (para. 20 of 62).

again, we see the use of the verb *veoir* in line 740 (“Et voit sor un trossel...”), which signals to the audience that what we about to hear is from the *vaslez*’s perspective. Again, the description of the food’s appearance is precise, implying its importance to the *vaslez*. Interestingly, it is on a *shiny* platter, which, as we know, would be attractive to him, but in addition, we can see that the *vaslez* is not only attracted to the shininess, but also to the food itself, which he does actually seem to recognise as being food immediately that he *sees* it, because he tucks in without hesitation. Rather as an infant is easily able to identify food, so too, it seems, can the *vaslez*, as it is something which is desired by the body’s instinctual urges- that is, neither learning nor developmental processes are required to understand that the body needs food for sustenance- it is an instinctive reaction.

Amidst his gulps, he has enough courtesy to suggest that the maiden eat some of the food (vv. 751-55), but he does not seem to have any concept of the fact that, because of his actions, she probably does not feel like eating. To him, we must assume that eating is simply something that one has to do to survive, not something which is a choice, proven by its distraction of him from more important matters, such as his mother’s advice, the maiden’s weeping, and as we shall see, the Grail itself. Thus, he does not notice the maiden’s tears and assumes that she will want to eat, because he thinks that she has to, as it is imperative for survival. And despite the food belonging to someone else he does not think to limit how much he takes (v. 761, below), because he seems to wish only to satisfy his own needs. This is rather reminiscent of an infant who does not understand why, if something he desires belongs to someone else, he cannot necessarily have it; this is a characteristic which is again demonstrated in our table of childhood (cf. p. 50)¹⁶²:

Et cil manja tant con lui plot
 Et but tant que assez an ot,
 Si recouvri le remenant. (vv. 761-63)

¹⁶² The *vaslez* behaves in much the same way when he wants the Red Knight’s armour. His reaction to being told he may not have the armour is to go as far as to kill the knight to get it, in some sort of impertinent tantrum.

It is a rather primitive way of thinking, because, as Cazelles points out, eating has a strictly nutritional value for the *vaslez*¹⁶³. However, she fails to notice that there is also a sign of at least some personal development in the *vaslez* because Chrétien tells us that he *enjoys* the food and wine, because of their taste, and so, it seems, not solely for their nutritional value: “Et verse an la cope d’arjant/ Del vin, qui n’estoit mie lez,” (vv. 748-49). Indeed he seems to go so far as to recognise that some wines may be better than others, and this particular one is ‘not terrible’. The specific topic of the enjoyment of food has not been mentioned in the various studies of childhood I have examined, though it does at least represent the fact that the *vaslez* seems to have made enough progress to be able firstly, to enjoy food for a reason other than bodily sustenance and secondly, to recognise that there can be differences between two similar objects.

The *vaslez* does, at last, makes some sort of a concession that he has upset the maiden, though he does not appear to truly understand why she is upset. He believes, it seems, that it is because he has taken a pretty object away from her (see vv. 767-68, below), as that is the sort of thing that he deems important. It is, however, more the loss of what the ring represents, rather than the loss of the object itself, that upsets her- it signifies her exclusivity and loyalty to her lover, and she knows what the consequences of the *vaslez*’s actions will be, whereas he is completely incapable of understanding this. This does suggest that he may have made a little progress in his maturation, as he has at least *noticed* her distress, but by not understanding it, he shows that he is still far more fixated on surface appearance and on pretty objects than on the internal effect he has had on the maiden:

Mais por Deu ne vos poist il mie
 De vostre anel que ja an port,
 Qu’eiçois que je muire de mort,
 Le vos guerredoneraî gié.
 Je m’an vois a vostre congié. (vv. 767-72)

However, despite this concession, he does nothing to right the wrong at this point, claiming only that he will make it up to her one day. Instead he leaves the maiden to

¹⁶³ Cazelles, p. 212.

the wrath of her lover and in spite of his terrible behaviour, he even has the audacity to ask for the maiden's leave. She replies that:

A Deu ne le commandera,
Car il li covandra por lui
Tant avoir honte et tant ennui
Que tant n'an ot nule cheitive,
Ne ja par lui, tant come il vive,
N'an avra secors ne aïe,
Si sache bien qu'il l'a traïe. (vv. 774-80)

So, what can be concluded from this? This is the *vaslez*'s first adventure after having left the bosom of his maternal home. Ariès tells us that, in medieval aristocratic society, the child left the family home at about 5-7 years old to pursue advancement¹⁶⁴, so one might see this as rather a late stage in the *vaslez*'s life to be leaving home. However, when we consider him from the point-of-view of childhood psychology (bearing in mind that he previously fitted the first sub-stage of the *infantia* category), this approximate age of 5-7 years does allow him to fit nicely into the second sub-stage of *infantia*, where we find many characteristics very reminiscent of him, including having a demanding nature, having no sense of ownership, being able to recognise parental authority and being able to perceive but not to reason (cf. p. 50). Thus, at least mentally speaking, the *vaslez* may actually be, by medieval standards, at precisely the correct age to leave home. The question is, though, does the *vaslez* conform to all the other characteristics expected of a child at this stage of development?

Firstly, we already know from our initial scene with the knights' armour that the covetousness that the *vaslez* displays is considered characteristic of a small child, and this idea is clearly continued in this scene, where the *vaslez* is distracted by pretty, shiny objects like the tent and the ring, as well as by food. This is again characteristic of the second sub-stage of *infantia* in our medieval model of childhood.

¹⁶⁴ Ariès, p. 356.

Secondly, we can conclude that Perceval has little or no pre-existing cultural knowledge on which to base his sense associations, which is why he mistakes the tent for a church. If we refer back to our medieval model of childhood, again this also finds its explanation, as I have already mentioned, in the second sub-stage of *infantia* where a child of this age is considered capable of perceiving but not of reasoning.

Thirdly, he has no sense of ownership, as proved by his stealing of the ring and the food despite having been told they belong to someone else; indeed, the fact that he would not listen to this other person's authority (other, that is, than his mother), shows that he is capable of recognising only parental (and in his case, maternal) authority.

In addition, he gives in to his infantile instinct to take what he wants and seek out food and anything else he finds attractive (here, a ring, later, the Red Knight's armour), when he needs or wants it, because he currently knows no other way of living, and he shows neither perception nor real acknowledgement of the effects of his actions on others. This is again a characteristic named in the second stage of *infantia*, where it is expected that a child of this age should display a particularly demanding nature.

We might consider who we are to feel is to blame for this 'mal-education'. It is of course his mother, who has shielded him from the world in order to protect him, and whose advice he believes in wholeheartedly, even though he does not entirely understand the full purport of her words. Ironically, her well-intentioned advice turns into an intense "moral malformation, which leads him into error and sin."¹⁶⁵

Rosemarie Deist confirms this point rather well:

Perceval demonstrates [...] his twofold ignorance in moral and civilized comportment. As in his interactions with his mother, the responses in this phase of his life are limited to base and crude instincts. Perceval is as unmoved by the lady's pleas as he was to his mother's entreaties. And, significantly, in both episodes he requires food. The uncontrollable trembling of the lady at the mere sight of him and her assessment of Perceval as "fols" (688) uncovers to the reader his mental and physical condition. [...] With this episode Chrétien

¹⁶⁵ Lacy, p. 27.

demolishes any notion of Perceval as a child who is coarse but yet innocent without causing any harm. His treatment of the 'demoiselle' conveys a ribald recklessness which emanates from Perceval's mental state.¹⁶⁶

Where I differ from Deist is on the issue that the *vaslez*'s 'mental state' is entirely reckless, as that would imply a certain amount of intention on his part. It seems far more likely that it is actually the case that his development thus far has been stunted, mainly by his mother's actively limited education, and by the way in which his perceptions have been limited by his seclusion in the forest, and it is only now that he has the scope in which to experience a kind of accelerated maturation, which is further proven by the fact that the *vaslez* does indeed seem to have progressed (if only a little) since the previous scene. This progression is not something that he is intentionally doing, rather his changing hormones are impelling him to behave in a certain way. Topsfield makes the point that it is the *vaslez*'s *nice* and naïve mind which makes his mother's counsel wither in real situations and it is this which essentially leads to disaster for the Tent Maiden¹⁶⁷, as when the maiden's lover returns and discovers what has happened, he shames her to follow him and never change her clothes until he finds the *vaslez* and kills him.¹⁶⁸

From the point of view of perception, it was mentioned that the *vaslez* so far has the ability to perceive but not to reason, as defined in our medieval model of childhood, but what about the theories of the faculty psychology? In two instances we see that the *vaslez* has now become capable of the recollection of objects, such that he can divorce an object he has seen from matter, and then recognise an object which looks the same, but is not actually the same object. The first instance is when the *vaslez* sees the pies; in order to recognise them, he must recall the image of a pie he has seen in the past. It is, of course, not the same pie, but it does resemble that pie in appearance, thus he is capable of recognising it as indeed being a pie. The second instance is slightly more abstract but nonetheless relevant. In recalling what he previously thought to be *bel* (shiny, pretty objects), he relates this idea of beauty to

¹⁶⁶ Deist, p. 226.

¹⁶⁷ Topsfield, pp. 234-36.

¹⁶⁸ It is important to note, however, that this does eventually lead to the *vaslez*'s redemption (at least for this episode), for when they meet again (vv. 3691-994), he vanquishes the maiden's lover and is thus forgiven for his previous wrong.

the shining, pretty tent. Therefore the object before him must be *bel*. This is the process which is defined by the faculty of *imagination*, which was discussed in the previous chapter, thus showing that he has also progressed by one stage in the hierarchy of faculties. In addition, the *vaslez*'s concentration is still primarily based on the 'appearance' rather than the 'essence' or meaning of an object. He does not yet, however, possess the ability to relate one object to another. Topsfield notes that at this point the *vaslez*'s "inner eye" is still blind¹⁶⁹ and has yet to develop fully enough to grasp abstract ideas and the true significance of objects. We may expect, then, that this 'inner eye' will continue to progress and eventually be able to see, as, so far at least, we have managed to prove that the *vaslez* has made undeniable developmental progress; therefore, we may presume that this progress will continue in a similar vein during the coming scenes.

After this scene, the *vaslez* will have three important encounters, which consideration of space makes it impossible to analyse in detail. Briefly, however, the first encounter (vv. 859-1131) brings him to Arthur's court, determined to acquire what he clearly considers to define knighthood, a suit of armour. He is oblivious to all communication with Arthur, refuses to contemplate any event other than- comically- to demand the armour of the *Chevalier Vermeil*. This brings him to a second encounter, with Gornemant (vv. 1351-698), who teaches him how to manipulate armour and arms, but fails to get him to *understand* what knighthood might be. His third encounter is with Blanchefleur (vv. 1699-2971), during which he is offered (rather ambiguously) love, but he is entirely focused on the triumphant feat of arms which bring him victory over Blanchefleur's enemies. It is, then, possible to characterise him as mature in the chivalric sense as these are all important components of the *vaslez*'s path to becoming a knight; indeed, by the end of these three episodes, it seems he has achieved all that is necessary for *chivalric* maturity¹⁷⁰, *but*, this is simply not enough. The *vaslez*'s *perceptions* of things do not

¹⁶⁹ Topsfield, p. 234.

¹⁷⁰ Erec and Yvain have taught us what is needed to obtain chivalric maturity- a balance of love and knightly prowess. From the *Chevalier Vermeil*, Perceval obtains armour; from Gornemant, the knowledge of how to use arms and from Blanchefleur, he gains love; thus he is fully equipped for chivalric maturity.

actually seem to change in these scenes, even with the introduction of his new mentor in Gornemant. These encounters do not, as our previous scenes have, convey any differences in his internal development as a *human being*, that is, in his internal development as conveyed by his perceptions of the world around him. Rather they look to his advancement and development towards being a *knight*, and this is achieved, it seems, by the rather superficial acquiring of particular items: armour, arms and a lover. However, there then comes a scene which allows us to learn precisely what internal progress the *vaslez* has actually made: his encounter with the Grail Castle and the Grail.

Chapter 4: The Grail Procession (vv. 3130-319)

This scene is often considered to be at the centre of the entire story, as it presents, for the first time, the object which appears in the title. Many choose to favour the Grail as being the object most central to the story's structural and thematic development as they claim that it in some way represents precisely what it is that the story is trying to convey¹⁷¹. It is beyond doubt that the specific details of this scene are richly suggestive and create an aura of mystery and wonder, tantalising to both the modern and medieval reader, but how precisely does Chrétien achieve this?

Let us look, then, at the finer detail of the scene in order to consider to what extent the centrality of the Grail can be confirmed or indeed, confuted. Most specifically, we need to discover whether it can be proven to be the object most central in the *development* of our *vaslez*; that is, to what extent does the *vaslez*'s reaction to this particular object reflect his reaching the most significant turning point thus far in his psychological, moral and chivalric career? In the light of our recent conclusions, what interpretations, concerning the link between the *vaslez*'s reactions to objects and his progressive development, can be made of his reactions to the Grail and the other objects in the scene? In other words, do his reactions to these objects effectively display the medieval conception of the typical characteristics of maturation and faculty development which we have discussed, and if so, does this scene actually provide the structural and developmental turning point that so many critics would have us believe it does?¹⁷²

¹⁷¹ See Emma Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz, 'The Central Symbol of the Legend: The Grail as Vessel', in *The Grail: A Casebook*, ed. by Dhira B. Mahoney (New York and London: Garland, 2000); Pickens, *The Welsh Knight*, p. 28; Topsfield, p. 214.

¹⁷² The Celticists are particularly in favour of this theory, see D. D. R. Owen, *The Evolution of the Grail Legend* (Edinburgh & London: Oliver and Boyd, 1968), p. 142; R. S. Loomis, *The Grail: From Celtic Myth to Christian Symbol* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1963), pp. 46-47; Arthur C. L. Brown, *The Origin of the Grail Legend* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1966), pp. 116-73. For the Grail as central symbol in a Christian sense, see Topsfield, pp. 209-215; Uitti and Freeman, p. 116 and p. 122. For the Grail as central structurally, see Olschki.

To answer this vital question, we would do well to look to episodes which happen even before the scene itself; that is, for signals that herald the importance and, indeed, the strangeness of the scene we are about to witness. Before the *vaslez* even enters the castle, there are several factors which may lead us to suspect we have somehow passed into an Other World. The river, for example, is a well-known medieval doorway into the supernatural world¹⁷³:

Et tant dura ceste proiere
Que il vint sor une riviére
A l'avalee d'une angarde.
L'eve roide et parfonde esgarde,
Si ne s'ose metre dedanz (vv. 2985-89)

The castle's mysterious appearance, as if from thin air, may well also suggest that this is not any normal castle¹⁷⁴. Notice once again the insistence on the verb *veoir*:

Maintenant cil s'an va amont
Tant que il vint anson le mont;
Et quant il fu anson le pui,
S'esgarda mout loing devant lui
Et ne vit rien fors ciel et terre
[...]
Lors vit devant lui an un val
Le chief d'une tor qui parut;
L'an ne trovast jusqu'a Barut
Si bele ne si bien assise. (vv. 3035-53, my emphasis)

In addition we might note that the above description of the castle's turret through the eyes of our protagonist alerts us to the fact that this is an exceptionally fine castle, and therefore that it is somehow out of the ordinary. Finally, the following exchange of words between the *prodome* and the *vaslez* suggests that, somewhere, time has mysteriously gone missing, as the *prodome* believes that if the *vaslez* were to have

¹⁷³ See Topsfield, who notes that the river signifies that 'a spiritual barrier has now to be crossed', p. 253; See also Howard Rollin Patch, 'Some Elements in Mediaeval Descriptions of the Otherworld', *PMLA*, 33 (1918), 601-43; Gerhart B. Ladner, 'Medieval and Modern Understanding of Symbolism: A Comparison', *Speculum*, 54 (1979), 223-56 (p. 236) for details of how the river may be interpreted.

¹⁷⁴ There are several explanations of this phenomenon, ranging from magic to the *vaslez* simply having not seen it at first. Cazelles views it merely as something he missed at first glance, p. 209, whilst Topsfield explains that the *vaslez* does not see the castle because of his *niceté*: he 'has no faith, no inner eye', p. 253; Pickens goes even further to describe the castle as having 'no physical reality whatsoever', as all that occurs inside it can be controlled merely by language rather than actions (like the asking of a question), *The Welsh Knight*, pp. 79-80.

travelled from Belrepaire, he would have had to have left before the watchman sounded the dawn (v. 3127). The *vaslez* assures him, however, that he actually left after the sounding of the dawn (v. 3128)¹⁷⁵:

«Amis,
De quel part venistes vos hui?
-Sire, fet il, hui matin mui
De Belrepeire, eins i a non.
-Si m'aït Deus, fet li prodon,
Trop grant jornee avez hui feite:
Vos meïstes, einz que la gueite
Eüst hui main l'aube cornee.
-Einz estoit ja prime sonee,
Fez li vaslez, jel vos afi.» (vv. 3120-29)

So, already alerted to the fact that things may not always be what they seem, we are almost expecting that other odd happenings may occur. And indeed, as the *vaslez* is conversing with the *prodome*, a squire enters carrying a sword, which he hands to the lord, who unsheathes it, so that it is possible to *see* the quality of the sword:

Et il l'a bien demie treite,
Si *vit* bien ou ele fu feite;
Car an l'espee estoit escrit.
Et avuec ce encore i *vit*
Qu'ele estoit de si bon acier
Que ja ne porroit depecier
Fors que par un tot seul peril
Que nus ne savoit fors que cil
Qui l'avoit forgiee et tanpree. (vv. 3135-43, my emphasis)

It is interesting here that, not only is the *vaslez* once again interested by a striking object- as we have come to expect- but he also appears to know something about it: that is, the details of not only where it was made (which is inscribed on the sword), but also, how it may be broken, which is, interestingly, *only* in one particular circumstance, though it is left entirely ambiguous as to what this circumstance is. One might question how it is he knows this simply from looking at the steel, especially when previously he has known so little else.¹⁷⁶ Does this perhaps signal a

¹⁷⁵ This point may be disputed by some as reading too much in to the word *trop* (v. 3125), as it simply means that the *vaslez* has travelled a great distance; I counter, however, that the subsequent dispute over whether it was before or after the dawn that the *vaslez* left Belrepaire is clear cut evidence that the journey has taken a shorter length of time than would normally be expected. Topsfield concurs that there is an issue of time to be considered: 'The adventure in the castle of the Fisher King takes place out of time and space', p. 259.

¹⁷⁶ It is, of course, possible to argue that there is an inscription on the sword which could possibly include the details of how the sword may be broken, but Chrétien never actually *says* this. He merely

new progression in the *vaslez*? At this stage, Chrétien remains inexplicit as to how it is that the *vaslez* may have access to this information, but it is clear that this seemingly unprompted knowledge may symbolise a change in the *vaslez*'s perceptual and deductive capabilities. We might think back to his encounter with the knights, for example, when he claimed he did not care about what an object was made of, only that it was attractive:

-De ce, fet il, ne sai je rien;
 Mes mout est biaux, se Deus me saut.
 Qu'an feites vos et que vos vaut? (vv. 266-67)

This dramatic change shows the audience that the *vaslez* now seems able to recognise that the quality of the materials used to make an object can bestow more significance on the object than mere attractiveness. Are we to understand that this is something that Gornemant has taught him during his arms training? We can never say for certain, as again, Chrétien remains ambiguous about how it is that the *vaslez* has come to understand this. In doing this, he builds up the audience's fascination for these objects at the same time as he does the *vaslez*'s; he makes clear efforts to describe the wondrous appearance of the sword, which then incites the audience's intrigue as to its significance, for, if it warrants such lengthy description, one would think it must surely be of great import to the story itself.

The squire then tells the lord that the sword is a gift from his niece and that he 'ne veïstes mains pesant'¹⁷⁷/ Del lonc ne del lé que ele a.' (vv. 3148-49), which confirms what the *vaslez* had already suspected from merely *looking* at the quality of steel, and in turn highlights again the significance and centrality of *seeing* to this episode. The squire continues by saying that his lady wishes the sword to be bestowed on someone who would use it well, as no others will ever be made. Clearly, this is an important sword, and we are alerted to a certain sense of destiny, both in hearing of the sword's eventual fate, and in the fact that the sword is to be bestowed on a

states that its origin is inscribed. This is a point which, I fear, must remain ambiguous, as Chrétien clearly meant it to be so.

¹⁷⁷ *pesant*, as in modern French, means 'heavy', but it can also mean burdensome, oppressive or even cumbersome. As we are about to discover, this sword has a particular destiny, which could mean that these latter definitions take on greater significance, particularly for the bearer of the sword.

particular person. Indeed, the lord shows no hesitation in bestowing this fine sword on the *vaslez*, despite his being unknown to the court:

Tantost li sire an revesti
Celui qui leanz ert estranges
De cele espee par les ranges,
Qui valoient un grant tresor. (vv. 3158-61)

We hear yet more of the beauty of the sword, and of its origins, though our first reaction is that this must come from the narrator's point of view, and be for the audience's benefit, as how otherwise could the *vaslez* know these details? Barber suggests, however, that it is in fact from the *vaslez*'s consciousness that we receive this information:

Everything here is described simply as Perceval [the *vaslez*] sees it, and it is only his emotions, not those of other participants, which are described. We both see and experience the procession as Perceval saw and experienced it.¹⁷⁸

This opinion is, however, only conceivable if the *vaslez* has mysteriously received more acute perceptive abilities and is therefore able to divine this information. If this is not the case, however, then Barber must be incorrect in effectively saying that it is the *vaslez* who is the 'focaliser' of this scene, and that it is solely through from his point-of-view that we see and experience the scene. In any case, Chrétien, at least for the time being, allows this point to remain somewhat ambiguous and simply gives the information, without explicitly stating whether it is the narrator or the *vaslez* who is expressing this information:

Li ponz de l'espee fu d'or,
Del meillor d'Arrabe ou de Grece,
Li fuerres d'orfois de Venece. (vv. 3162-64)

The narrator then moves away from the description of the sword to a description of its function, through the words of the *prodome*, who reiterates the idea of destiny by stating:

«Biaus sire, ceste espee
Vos fu jugiee et destinee,
Et je vuel mout que voz l'aïiez;
Mes ceigniez le, si la traïiez.» (vv. 3167-70)

¹⁷⁸ Richard Barber, *The Holy Grail: Imagination and Belief* (London: Allen Lane, 2004), p. 20.

It seems the lord believes that the sword was meant for the *vaslez*, suggesting a certain amount of foreknowledge in the *prodome*. Surely, therefore, it must also be the *vaslez*'s destiny that he find himself at this castle; it seems he was expected to arrive there. Strangely though, the *vaslez* seems to take this in his stride and does not even question why this should be his destiny, and indeed what this destiny actually entails. Perhaps this is because he has no comprehension of the responsibilities that accompany and which are signified by 'destiny'. Instead of enquiring more about this, he simply accepts the sword, draws it from its scabbard, showing us that he is receptive to the fact that he has a destiny, and accepts that destiny, but is not reflective upon that fact, and does not seek to question what the significance of that destiny might be. The narrator tells us:

Et sachiez que de grant meniere¹⁷⁹
 Li sist au flanc et miauz el poing,
 Et sanbla bien que au besoing
 S'an deüst eidier come ber. (vv. 3176- 79)

This again emphasises to the audience that the sword was effectively made for the *vaslez*. This tells the audience that it is not only the sword that is of consequence, but also that the *vaslez* himself must have some higher significance, as he has been bestowed with an object of evidently high import and destiny. One might well begin to question precisely what this significance actually is. Topsfield suggests that:

With this sword, the Fisher King recognises Perceval's destiny as an Elect [...] who will accomplish the highest tasks of knighthood. But Perceval will not yet live up to these expectations. Figuratively he still wears the sword of Gornemant.¹⁸⁰

The point is, he clearly is not yet mature enough to take on the burden of accomplishing the highest tasks of knighthood, as he is still under the instruction of Gornemant and therefore still reacts to objects and situations in the way he has been taught. He does not even understand the full implications of destiny. The connotation of this is that he still has much to learn and a considerable process of maturity to undergo. He cannot achieve the highest tasks of knighthood until he has

¹⁷⁹ Variant of *maniere* meaning *Art und Weise* in the sense of the outward manner of something or someone- thus, reiterating the importance of surface appearance. See T-L, V, 1062-71.

¹⁸⁰ Topsfield, p. 255; see also Donald Maddox, 'The Anterior Order in *Le Conte du Graal*' in *The Arthurian Romances of Chrétien de Troyes: Once and Future Fictions* (Cambridge etc.: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 82-118 (p. 92).

learnt these vital lessons. He then looks around for the squire responsible for his arms to take the sword and put it with his other armour:

Derriere lui *vit* vaslez ester
Antor le feu qui cler ardoit;
Celui qui ses armes gardoit
I *vit* et si li comanda
S'espee, et cil la li garda. (vv. 3180-84, my emphasis)

What is interesting here is the insistence on *voir* again, as the *vaslez* not only *sees* his 'arms' squire, but he also *knows* and *recognises* that it is his arms squire. It seems that the narrator wishes to emphasise the fact that the *vaslez* has successfully recognised his target- a person whom he has seen previously, has recalled to mind, and whose function he is effectively able to identify, without the aid of exterior sources of knowledge such as other knights etc. It is proof that he has progressed since his initial scene with the knights in the forest, where he was unable to identify the function of a great many objects. In addition it also confirms our having considered him in full command of the faculty of *imagination*, where he should be capable of the recognition and identification of objects that he has seen in the past.

When he returns to his seat, we are told that the candles burn brighter in this hall than in any other. The *vaslez*, too, must notice how bright they are, even if he has little to compare them to. Suddenly another squire enters the hall carrying a white lance by the middle of its shaft. This seems an odd way to hold a lance, as one might expect it to be held by its handle¹⁸¹. The narrator tells us:

Et tuit cil de leanz *veoient*
La lance blanche et le fer blanc,
S'issoit une gote de sanc
Del fer de la lance au somet,
Et jusqu'a la main au vaslet
Coloit cele gote vermoille. (vv. 3196-201, my emphasis)

This makes it absolutely clear that everyone (including the *vaslez*) has *seen* and witnessed this marvel, and that it is indisputable that it actually happened. It may be

¹⁸¹ If we assume that the lance is being held vertically, rather than horizontally (confirmed by the fact that in the forthcoming lines, the blood runs down the shaft to the squire's hands), holding it by the middle of the shaft rather than the handle may indeed seem an odd way to hold a lance. For excellent illustrations of medieval lances and spears see 'Medieval Armor and Weapons in the Middle Ages', <<http://medieval.ucdavis.edu/20C/Weapons.html>> [accessed 15 August 2004].

a marvel, but it is not the figment of anyone's imagination. The narrator continues to tell us that:

Li vaslez vit cele mervoille
Qui leanz ert la nuit venuz,
Si s'est del demander tenuz
Comant cele chose avenoit,
Que de trop parler se gardast;
Si crient, se il le demandast,
Qu'an li tenist a vilenie:
Por ce si nel demanda mie. (vv. 3202-12, my emphasis)

This passage is the key to the scene. The *vaslez* clearly does recognise that there is something remarkable about this lance, but adheres to the courtly code as taught to him by Gornemant, and is therefore not given free rein to ask about this marvellous object for fear that he will appear uncouth. He is receptive to the fact that the lance is remarkable, but is not capable of reflecting on and interiorising that fact. He makes the mistake of sticking unwaveringly and rather too literally to the advice of his mentor, where before he adhered only to particular snippets of his mother's advice (even then, though, his take on the advice was rather too literal), and was therefore able to behave and speak freely. Interestingly, elsewhere, Gornemant's advice serves as a paradigm for maturation and growth:

A model which continues to function as a basis for Perceval's self-concept. This advice does not impede Perceval's success at Belrepaire, rather it tends to promote it; but, in the Grail Castle, it proves to be insufficient and stifling.¹⁸²

In other words, in a courtly situation, such as that at Belrepaire, Gornemant's advice is paramount to the *vaslez*'s success, but in this seemingly otherworldly castle, it does not serve the same purpose, and we might therefore say that the castle is not governed by the values of the courtly code, in that 'not talking too much' appears to lead to failure. This does make considerable sense, but it is perhaps even more accurate to consider that what the *vaslez* is actually doing, is precisely that which he did with his mother's advice. He accepts the letter, but not the spirit of the advice; put another way, he understands the surface meaning of the advice but cannot delve deep enough so as to understand the significance of the advice. Gornemant has said: 'vos chasti/ De trop parler' (vv. 1655-56), but he does not define explicitly what he

¹⁸² Pickens, *The Welsh Knight*, p. 28.

means by *trop* and where the limitations of talking lie. Clearly, the *vaslez* has simply taken it to mean that he should speak rarely, rather than determining that he should actually speak *according* to the particular situation with which he is confronted.

The amount of light in the hall having been noted, it is startling, then, that even more light enters the hall in the form of two squires carrying candelabra, each holding at least ten candles- a large number in the Middle Ages, which also emphasises the sheer amount of light that must be emanating from them. The shining beauty of both the candelabra and the squires is pointed out, underlining the *vaslez*'s continued preoccupation with light and the visual:

Atant dui autre vaslet vindrent,
Qui chandeliers an lor mains tindrent
De fin or, ovrez a neel.
Li vaslet estoient mout bel
Qui les chandeliers apportoient;
An chascun chandelier ardoient
Dis chandoiles a tot le mains. (vv. 3213-20)

Accompanying these squires is a maiden who is carrying *un graal*. It is mentioned as though it is an easily recognisable, everyday object and oddly, although this is clearly the object we have been waiting for, the narrative veers off to discuss the maiden's appearance instead of addressing the question of what this object is. She is 'Bele et jante et bien acesmee.' (v. 3223), and whilst most seem to believe that the sudden abundance of light emanates from the Grail, for example:

There is a painstaking progression of light, with the prodigious luster of the 'graal' twice told. First the strange brightness emanating from it, then the splendor of the gold and jewels, before and after the passage of the platter.¹⁸³

the narrative actually seems to suggest that the source of this light is somewhat indeterminate. Indeed the language used suggests that it is the effect of the *maiden* entering the room with the Grail, rather than the Grail itself, that illuminates the room so brightly (see particularly v. 3224 and v. 3226: When *she* enters, a great

¹⁸³ Frappier, p. 180; see also Uitti and Freeman, p. 94; Olschki, p. 15 and Topsfield, p. 208.

brilliance lights the room- the fact she is carrying the Grail seems of almost secondary importance.)¹⁸⁴:

*Quant ele fu leanz antree
Atot le graal qu'ele tint,
Une si grant clartez i vint
Qu'ausi perdirent les chandoiles
Lor clarté come les estoiles
Quant li solauz lieve, ou la lune.* (vv. 3224-29, my emphasis)

We might notice the repetitive use of words relating to heavenly bodies, as they serve several purposes. They firstly confirm to the audience just how bright the light in the hall is and secondly, they are objects which belong to the heavens or to another world- meaning that they also bring a kind of spiritual significance in addition to their simple shining surface appearance to the scene. Thirdly and most importantly, given that they are shiny objects and that the light from the candles in some way resembles them, we know that this brilliance is something that the *vaslez* would not only be attracted to, but also something that he would be familiar with because we can assume that he has at least once seen the night sky. Thus, this is the sort of comparison he might actually be capable of making, as the stars, sun and moon are things that he would be able to recall to mind, and being that we know that he reached the stage of *imagination* in the previous scene, he would therefore be able to apply the brilliance of these heavenly bodies to the scene before him, despite his apparent lack of other perceptive capabilities. Another interesting observation is that these are *remarkable* objects. Until now, the *vaslez*'s fascination has been with everyday objects, like armour, jewellery, food and tents, and whilst previously he has displayed his fascination quite openly, here he perceives for the first time *truly* remarkable objects and yet remarks only fleetingly, internally, on their wondrousness, and actually appears to remain both internally, and more importantly, externally, rather unmoved or even uninterested by them (see vv. 3243-47 and 3304-11, quoted below).

¹⁸⁴ Owen, too, notes this: 'The radiance is connected not, as is commonly supposed, with the grail itself, but rather with the maiden', p. 145.

Even then, the narrative does not return to the Grail; instead we hear that another maiden enters, carrying a *tailleur d'arjant*. There is no further discussion of this object after its entrance¹⁸⁵ and no explanation is offered- simply, the narrative at last returns to the seemingly elusive object that is the Grail, and we learn, again, that it is a most wonderful Grail, as it is set with the finest and most beautiful stones imaginable:

Li graaus, qui aloit devant,
De fin or esmeré estoit;
Pierres precieuses avoit
El graal de maintes menieres,
Des plus riches et des plus chieres
Qui an mer ne an terre soient:
Totes autres pierres passoient
Cele del graal sanz dotance. (vv. 3232-39)

As we have seen before with the knights' armour and the Tent Maiden's ring, these shiny stones and precious metals are precisely the sorts of things we know that the *vaslez* finds attractive. It is no surprise, then, that he appears to look at them in such detail, as we know he is preoccupied with anything that reflects light. It is clearly, however, only the narrator who knows that these stones are the finest- how *could* the *vaslez* possibly know this? Therefore, this information, we presume, must be given for the audience's benefit alone. Importantly the Grail then passes 'Tot ausi con passa la lance' (v. 3240) which surely places this object in the same marvellous realm as the lance- it appears to be an equally mysterious object. And throughout this time, the *vaslez* does not remove his gaze or interest from the objects passing in front of him:

Et li vaslez les vit passer
Et n'osa mie demander
Del graal cui l'an an servoit,
Que toz jorz an son cuer avoit

¹⁸⁵ Indeed it is a subject that critics have a tendency to avoid; Topsfield never mentions it, and Loomis assumes that Chrétien actually forgot to give any explanation of it (*The Grail: From Celtic Myth to Christian Symbol*, pp. 61-62). Olschki begins by merely stating that it forms part of the procession (p. 11) and then resigns himself to the fact that it is something to which we will never find a solution as it appears to serve no purpose whatsoever (pp. 16-17), though he does acknowledge that it may recall the dish that 'bore the symbolic bread distributed to the faithful in their sole Sunday rite when they invoked the incorporeal Jesus of their faith' in Catharist communities (pp. 24-25). He is, however, sceptical that there is any real religious connection as he sees some of the imagery as distinctly sacrilegious, thus making no discernable conclusion to its purpose whatsoever.

La parole au prodome sage, (vv. 3243-47, my emphasis)

Again, he *sees* and is receptive to the objects, but does not yet make the higher step to reflecting upon them and therefore understanding what they signify, and once more this can be seen as a conscious choice, as he is still too tied to the courtly code, as set down by Gornemant, to ask the question he desires to ask, and therefore chooses to remain silent. Chrétien interjects, in the first person, (which is not a regular occurrence in the *Conte*, implying this must be a particular point of note) that he suspects this may be an error and deliberately places doubt in his audience's mind over whether this is a good choice or not:

Si criem que il n'i et damage
Por ce que j'ai oï retreire
Qu'ausi bien se puet an trop teire
Con trop parler a la foiee.
Ou bien l'an praigne ou mal l'an chiee,
Ne lor anquiert ne ne demande. (vv. 3248-53)

Indeed Chrétien, in his interjection, gives us the distinct impression that it may have been a well-known piece of advice in the Middle Ages that one should not be mute. He tells us that he has 'heard it said' that it may lead to failure if one remains too silent. Thus we are given a sense of foreboding, which comes directly from the horse's mouth, so to speak, about the *vaslez's* choice to remain reticent. Lacy concurs that the *vaslez's* decision at this point is an erroneous one:

Perceval's failure to ask the proper question [...] is itself a symbolic depiction of the inadequacy of the chivalric code as he had accepted it and of the necessity for that code to be completed, if not replaced, by individual and personal acts of charity.¹⁸⁶

The text then moves on to an in-depth description of the dinner preparations which the *vaslez* is witnessing. This tells the audience that this is a particularly fine feast- the ivory table is made from a single piece of ivory, and the supports are made of the finest wood. Again, Chrétien remains ambiguous as to whether this comes from the *vaslez's* or the narrator's viewpoint, but if we are to assume it is from the *vaslez's*,

¹⁸⁶ Lacy, p. 17. Lacy argues that the Grail is related to fertility, abundance and life, and by not restoring the Roi Pêcheur's health and land, but subsequently vowing to do so, the implication is that the *vaslez* also feels a compulsion to restore himself- which means perfecting both his character and his code.

we might again question how it is that the *vaslez* knows this information. After all, these are not the sorts of judgments he would previously have been able to make. Is it the case that he has somehow become able to divine certain pieces of information? Perhaps most interesting of the objects in the feast is the tablecloth:

Sor cez eschaces fu assise
La table, et la nape sus mise.
Mes que diroie de la nape?
Legaz ne chardonaus ne pape
Ne manja onques sor si blanche. (vv. 3275-79)

This sudden interjection of religious imagery points undeniably to an interesting issue. If neither cardinals nor the pope have eaten off such a white cloth, does this not suggest that the lord of this castle (and indeed the *vaslez*) is in some way holier (and perhaps even purer, given that the tablecloth is white) than these holiest of men?

Immediately the narrative moves away from the setting to the actual food served in the feast. This is described in great detail, and as we know, previously food has been of great importance to the *vaslez*. Indeed it has been such a preoccupation, that, whilst eating, he only half listened to the advice of his mother, and ignored the fact that he had offended the Tent Maiden. Again we find ourselves in a world where sense impressions take precedence over meaning and significance:

Li premiers mès fu d'une hanche
De cerf de greisse au poivre chaut.
Vins clers ne raspez ne lor faut
A cope d'or sovent a boivre.
De la hanche de cerf au poivre
Uns vaslez devant aus trancha,
Qui a soi treite la hanche a
Atot le *taillor d'arjant*,
Et les morsiaus lor met devant
Sor un gastel qui fu antiers. (vv. 3280-89, my emphasis)

Is the *taillor d'arjant* here the same one as we saw in the procession? If so, what is its significance? This is especially important to consider as the very next thing we are told is that during the serving of the meal, the Grail mysteriously passes back and

forth in front of them¹⁸⁷, but still, the *vaslez* remains silent, and it is again insisted upon that it is due to Gornemant's words that he does so:

Et li graaus andemantiers
Par devant aus retrespassa,
Et li vaslez ne demanda
Del graal cui l'an an servoit:
Por le prodome se tenoit,
Qui doucemant le chastia
De trop parler, et il i a
Tor jorz son cuer, si l'an sovient. (vv. 3290-97)

Here we might question whether the *vaslez* actually needs to emancipate himself from the courtly code, as again, the narrator is rather emphatic in telling us that this is a bad decision and foolish (see vv. 3298-99 below). This continual reemphasis on the fact that the advice that the *vaslez* has received may be flawed (or at least misinterpreted) is proof that the *vaslez* must free himself from this dependence upon the surface appearance of the advice of others if he is to make the *right* decisions. In this case, the reason why the *vaslez* should have asked the question, Chrétien tells us, is specifically because he has *seen* 'the Grail pass by completely uncovered' several times (see vv. 3300-01 below). Quite what the significance of the Grail's being uncovered is remains, as with many other things, a mystery (perhaps there is something inside the Grail, but this is never explicitly stated), and despite the *vaslez*'s curiosity and his wanting to know the answers to the mysteries, the narrator speaks indirectly and tells us that, nevertheless, the *vaslez* chooses to not ask the questions:

Mes plus se test qu'il ne covient,
Qu'a chascun més don l'an servoit

¹⁸⁷ The Grail moves mysteriously backwards and forwards, and it may well seem to furnish the guests with food as it does so. The Celticists tend to see this as symbolic of some sort of Pagan horn of plenty (see Loomis, *The Grail: From Celtic Myth to Christian Symbol*, p. 381 and Owen, p. 211), and certainly the form of procession followed by repetitive movement does seem reminiscent of ritual (see R. S. Loomis, *The Grail Story of Chrétien de Troyes as Ritual and Symbolism*, pp. 840-52). However, what is strange is that we later discover that the Grail is actually serving the Roi Pêcheur's father in another room, so what is it doing passing backwards and forwards in the hall when it is supposedly elsewhere? Loomis rightly recognises this (*The Grail: From Celtic Myth to Christian Symbol*, pp. 381-82), so we can infer, if nothing else, that it is not mere coincidence that food appears as the Grail passes by- clearly something mystical is at work. How else could the Grail effectively be in two places at once, both serving the Roi Pêcheur's father and delivering food to the guests?

Par devant lui trespasser voit
 Le graal trestot descovert,
 Mes il ne set cui l'an an sert,
 Et si le voldroit mout savoir; (vv. 3298-303, my emphasis)

Most importantly he puts off the question in favour of returning again to one of his favourite preoccupations- food (as previously discussed), which continues to provide a distraction from important episodes for the *vaslez*. The asking of this question is evidently deeply crucial to the story, and so his delaying it until the next day (v. 3307, below) in favour of satisfying his base urges alerts us to his continued lack of maturity:

Mes il le demandera voir,
 Ce dit et panse, ainz qu'il s'an tort,
 A un des vaslez de la cort,
 Mes *jusqu'au matin* atandra
 Que au seignor congié prandra
 Et a tote l'autre meisnice.
 Einsi la chose a respitice,
 S'antant a boivre et a mangier. (vv. 3304-11, my emphasis)

The narrator finishes this enigmatic scene by making use of *discours indirect libre* in order to express what is happening inside the consciousness of the *vaslez*: the significance of the Grail is somehow forgotten, and the extraordinary quality of the food appears to take precedence as it is described as being fit for kings. This has been suggested as being an antithesis of carnal and spiritual sustenance, which highlights Perceval's moment of crisis; his weakness and failure.¹⁸⁸ For example, to make the point abundantly clear, Chrétien reiterates the fact that it is the finest food anyone could ever eat, and the adjectives *pleisant* and *delitable*¹⁸⁹ appear to be conveying the opinions of the *vaslez* himself, underlining that he is still mainly stimulated by sensory gratifications:

L'an n'apporte mie a dangier
 Les més ne le vin a la table,
 Qui sont *pleisant* et *delitable*.
 Li mangiers fu biaux et buens;
 De toz les més que rois ne cuens
 Ne anperere doie avoir

¹⁸⁸ Topsfield, p. 256.

¹⁸⁹ Whilst *pleisant* merely bears the connotation of something which is pleasing or enjoyable (*gefallend, angenehm*, T-L, VII, 1049-51), *delitable* is often translated as gratifying or satisfying, particularly with reference to carnal urges (*erfreulich, Wohlgefallen findend*, T-L, II, 1334-35), which does reiterate the *vaslez*'s tendency to obey his instinct above all else.

Fu li prodon serviz le soir,
Et li vaslez ansamble o lui. (vv. 3312-19)

So whilst shades of the *vaslez* we have known are still very much present in this scene, his reaction to the enigmatic procession does seem to suggest a further progression in his personal development as he recognises the fact that there are questions to be asked about these objects, though he is still so tied to authority and dependent on Gornemant's teaching of the chivalric code that he cannot bring himself to contravene that authority and ask the all-important question. Deist says that:

His [the *vaslez*'s] interpretations of the Grail mysteries he witnesses are still limited to the visual realm in that he can see and marvel but cannot yet comprehend.¹⁹⁰

Whilst the general sentiment of this statement clearly concurs with what we have so far discovered, the use of the word 'interpretation' seems wrong in this context. The *vaslez* does not appear to even attempt to interpret the Grail¹⁹¹ and its accompanying objects, rather, he just recognises the fact that he will need to ask about them; again, he is receptive, but not reflective¹⁹².

¹⁹⁰ Deist, p. 228.

¹⁹¹ It seems important here to also acknowledge the body of material that lends itself to *religious* or *cultic* interpretations of the Grail. There are, of course, the many obvious Celtic and Christian versions of what the Grail might signify that I have referred to during the course of this thesis. In addition, one might also consider some of the lesser known theories, such as Iranian and Persian conjecture which conceives the Grail to be 'le "Xvarnah" perse, la lumière de la Gloire, l'Être ressuscité': see Paulette Duval, *La Pensée alchimique et le 'Conte du Graal'* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1979), p. 344. Helen Adolf's theory, by contrast, asserts an interpretation that the Grail is a kind of talisman, designed to undo some of the damage done to the Church's reputation by the loss of Jerusalem in 1187. See her *Visio Pacis: Holy City and Grail* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1960). In addition, and undeniably relevant, is the Jewish interpretation of the Grail which claims a precedent in the *Seder* ritual: a series of questions asked by the youngest present at the beginning of Passover as a sort of coming-of-age test, which is in many ways reminiscent of our *vaslez*'s behaviour. See Eugene J. Weinraub, *Chrétien's Jewish Grail* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976), pp. 50-117. However, we have asserted that the *vaslez* has no real concept of faith or religion as yet, thus if we are to accept a religious interpretation of the Grail at this stage, we would be assuming a level of development not yet achieved by the *vaslez*. However, that a religious meaning may *later* be bestowed upon the object (e.g. after the cessation of the narrative, or by later continuators or adaptors) is a theory that may hold some sway, especially if we consider that the height of the *vaslez*'s personal development in the existing narrative is to occur with the Hermit, at the moment of his comprehension of *religious* duty.

¹⁹² For an excellent discussion on some of the many ways in which Chrétien takes great pains to distinguish between appearances and realities, and exteriorised and interiorised forms thereof, see Uitti and Freeman, p. 117.

If we refer back to our table detailing the characteristics of the stages of childhood, we might place the *vaslez* in the early stages of *pueritia* (cf. p. 50). That is, he has reached the age of reason, whereby he is able to begin making reasoned choices. Admittedly, his choice here is not the right one, but he does reason that if the code says he should not speak, then he should remain silent. What he does not yet show is an understanding of responsibilities or any ability to choose or to reason *accurately*¹⁹³. He receives the sword and takes on its responsibilities without actually knowing or comprehending what those responsibilities are. Thus, we may place our *vaslez*'s mental age in the very beginnings of the age of reason, at about seven years, as he displays only some of the characteristics expected of a child in this category.

When considering his perceptive abilities, we may return to our medieval concept of faculty psychology and see that the faculty of *imagination* still very much governs his capabilities. That is, he can recall objects he has seen previously and therefore recognise the identities of other objects which bear significant resemblance. For example, he recognises that the lance is indeed a lance; it is, of course, a *different* lance to the other lances he has seen in the past, but its physical resemblance to these other lances that he has seen means that he is able to positively identify it as indeed being a lance. However, in many ways, we can recognise that the *vaslez* has also progressed in the hierarchy of faculties. He suddenly, and strangely, seems able to recognise that many of the objects in this hall are the finest in the world, despite the fact he has very little experience of the world. This is a characteristic of the faculty of *reason*, which allows a person to divorce an object from matter and relate it to all associated objects (by comparison of appearance, action or function), conceiving the universal class of which it is a species. So whilst he recognises that, for example, the stones adorning the Grail are precious stones, because he has seen similar stones in the past, he is also able to make a judgement on the quality of the stones in relation to the rest of their species. So where before we speculated that he might be unable to make these sort of perceptions due to his lack of experience, perhaps here we can

¹⁹³ This is not to say he is entirely incapable of choice and reason, rather that he cannot yet make the *right* choice or reason.

find our explanation in the fact that he appears to have taken a further step in his maturation; for example, when he was mysteriously able to recognise that the sword was of the finest quality, it may be seen that he recalled previous swords he had known, and was then able to compare their quality and thus make the judgement that this sword is finer than the others.

What it is important to recognise is that the *vaslez* has clearly not yet reached the pinnacle of his maturation according to medieval standards (i.e. the stage of *adolescentia* and the faculty of *intelligence*, cf. pp. 50-57), so how can it be that the grail, so often cited as central, is the key turning point in the *vaslez*'s progression¹⁹⁴, such that he may now be seen as an adult¹⁹⁵? As we have said, he has not reached maturity and he has not achieved the task at hand, indeed he has positively failed himself and his apparent destiny. So if the enigmatic object that is the Grail is not the object which produces the ultimate turning point in the *vaslez*'s progression, then might it not be more accurate to look beyond the Grail, and consider that this turning point might actually happen at some other point in the narrative?

So what can we state for certain? We know that, at least at this stage, it may not be seen that the Grail provides a key moment of progression for the character, and, in addition, the Grail is not even the subject of the important question ('Whom does the grail serve?')- rather the subject is the person who is served by the Grail.¹⁹⁶ The Grail does not appear again in the text that we have, but we may infer that, had the tale been finished, it seems likely the Grail would have been returned to, and thus may have been promoted in importance and have been representative of the *vaslez*'s ultimate maturity; it is, after all, the object which appears in the title. As it is, however, it would be wrong to suggest that it is (at least thus far) anything more than

¹⁹⁴ For example, 'The centrality of the Grail episode in Perceval's story points to its determining role in effecting the transformation of Perceval', Cazelles, p. 226.

¹⁹⁵ 'Perceval est maintenant un homme, un adulte. Finis sont les jeux et les devinettes de l'enfance: seul l'attrait des plus grands mystères doit émouvoir le héros.', Pierre Gallais, *Perceval et l'initiation* (Paris: Sirac, 1975), p. 54.

¹⁹⁶ Lacy, p. 64.

one in a series of objects which contribute somehow equally to the *vaslez*'s process of maturation. Lacy makes a fine point in saying that:

The symbolism of the Grail is progressively displaced from the object toward its effect and ultimately to a person's reaction to it. The movement coincides with Perceval's development from a fascination with objects to a gradual comprehension of their function.¹⁹⁷

So whilst the Grail does, as Lacy suggests, form part of the *vaslez*'s progression, in that it is representative of it by way of the *vaslez*'s reaction to it, it is *not*, however, necessarily the key to his maturation. Gallais similarly suggests that the Grail is not the pivotal object at this point; he believes that it is actually the *vaslez* himself (rather than another, more inanimate object, as I will come to suggest) that is the important and central object, and that the Grail effectively only takes on a particular meaning because of the significance that is given to it. For example, just as the mountain is not the important thing, rather the ascension, the Grail, too, is not the important thing, rather the quest:

Il n'y pas de secret du Graal. Il n'y a que le secret que Perceval porte en lui-même. [...] Ce qu'il y a de «merveilleux» dans *Perceval*, c'est Perceval. Ce ne sont pas les choses qui sont merveilleuses, c'est le *sens* qu'on leur donne.¹⁹⁸

What we can take from this is that whilst we, as the audience, may look to attribute deeper meanings to objects, as we have the ability to look beyond surface appearance, the *vaslez* is not yet capable of doing this, remaining preoccupied with that which lies on the surface. As long as he attributes no meaning to these objects, they, of course, remain meaningless to him. It is only with *his* gradual recognition of the deeper meanings of objects that we can decipher exactly what it is that is central to an understanding of the story, and whilst I agree with Gallais that the *vaslez* himself is in many ways central to this full understanding, I suggest that it is rather the importance of objects that is central, as they act as the vital catalysts in his progression towards maturity. It is only via this medium of objects and their effects on the *vaslez* that we can truly understand the essence of the story. So if it is not the Grail which constitutes the pivotal object, what is the true object of importance, and where does the turning point actually occur?

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 17.

¹⁹⁸ Gallais, p. 235.

After the Grail scene, the *vaslez* has an enlightening episode with his cousin, as is touched upon in the next chapter (pp. 97-98), and he then meets the Tent Maiden for the second time, who has been punished cruelly by her lover for her 'infidelity'. When the *vaslez* realises that this wrong is of his doing, he immediately sets out to redeem both himself and the maiden, and succeeds by defeating her lover in combat. Thus, we could say that he undoes his previous sin. However, this is not a scene governed by *perceptual* development, as he recognises only morally speaking that the maiden was not in any way at fault- he does not actually *see* and *understand* how and why *his* actions were wrong; simply, he focuses on his misappropriation of objects and equates- absurdly- the kiss and the ring with the pies and the wine; he is not, in other words, ready to understand the return of his wrong-doing:

Quant Percevaus escouté l'ot,
 Si li respondi mot a mot:
 «Amis, or saches sanz dotance
 Qu'ele a feite sa penitance;
 Car je sui cil qui la beisa
 Maugré suen, et mout l'an pesa;
 Et son anel an son doi pris,
 Ne plus n'i ot, ne plus n'i fis.
 Et si manjai, je vos afi,
 Des trois pasteiz un et demi
 Et del vin bui tant con je vos:
De ce ne fis je pas que fos. (vv. 3901-10, my emphasis)

This is, however, about to change, and I turn now to a scene which *is* dominated by perception- the scene with the blood drops on the snow- and which, I believe, represents Perceval's reaching a stage where he is ready to achieve moral and spiritual maturity.

Chapter 5:

The Blood Drops on the Snow

(vv. 4160-465)

As we have just discussed, there are a number of critics who see the Grail scene not only as the most spectacular scene in the *Conte* and the key to the romance (as indeed Chrétien de Troyes's title would suggest), but also as the major turning point in the *vaslez*'s development, due at least in part to its use, they suggest, of Celtic archetypes, of which the connotations can be seen to imply that this scene is the most important of all the scenes¹⁹⁹. It is my argument, however, that it is the scene that I am about to analyse which is the most crucial to both the structural development of the story and to the personal development of our main character which will find its fullest expression in the coming episode with the Hermit. There are, incidentally, a particular group of critics who also view this scene as the final step in the *vaslez*'s courtly education and/or his initiation into the spiritual consequences²⁰⁰ of that, but whilst they give emphasis to the scene's importance for the *vaslez*'s development, I submit that they do not give credit to the scene's wider importance within the structure of the romance, as I will now attempt to show.

At this point, we have at last learnt our *vaslez*'s true name. It is *Percevaus li Galois* (v. 3575), and he has guessed it just moments after having left the Grail Castle, when he runs into a damsel, who happens to be his cousin, mourning the loss of her lover.

¹⁹⁹ R. S. Loomis, *Arthurian Tradition and Chrétien de Troyes* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1949); Jean Frappier, *Le Roman breton: Perceval ou le Conte du Graal* (Paris: Centre de documentation universitaire, 1966); Heinrich Zimmer, *Keltische Studien* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1881) p. 203; J. Vendryes, 'Les Eléments celtiques de la légende du Graal', *Etudes Celtiques*, 5 (1950-51), 1-50 (p. 18); W. A. Nitze, 'Perceval and the Holy Grail', *University of California Publications in Modern Philology*, 28 (1949), 281-332 (p. 311).

²⁰⁰ Reto R. Bezzola, *Le Sens de l'aventure et de l'amour: Chrétien de Troyes* (Paris: Le Jeune Parquet, 1947); M. Lot-Borodine, 'Le Conte du Graal de Chrétien de Troyes et sa présentation symbolique', *Romania*, 77 (1956) 235-88; Gustave Cohen, *Un grand romancier d'amour et d'aventure au XIIIe siècle: Chrétien de Troyes et son œuvre* (Paris: Boivin, 1931); D. C. Fowler, *Prowess and Charity in the 'Perceval' of Chrétien de Troyes* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1959); Grace Armstrong, 'The Scene of the Blood Drops on the Snow', *Kentucky Romance Quarterly*, 19 (1972), 127-47; Philip Mellen, 'Blood on the Snow: The Development of a Motif', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 15 (1978), 363-71.

She reprimands him for his silence in the Grail Castle and tells him that his mother is dead. When she asks his name, he is suddenly able to tell it to her, even though the text tells us that he previously had not known his name (vv. 3573-77). Upon hearing this, the maiden suddenly recognises her cousin, and tells him that his name has changed to *Percevaus li cheitis* (v. 3582) as he sinned against his mother in leaving her for dead on her doorstep (vv. 620-25). This entire episode draws attention to the importance of a name. As we have seen in our study of childhood, a name equals identity, and the learning of one's identity is equivalent to a further step towards maturity. Our table tells us that it represents the all-important crossover from *pueritia* to *adolescentia* (cf. p. 50), in that a child in the final stages of *pueritia* should start to understand the significance of their name as a defining feature. Thus this scene must herald another step in Perceval's progression, not least in that his name is clearly also a definition: his name is unique in the *Conte* as it consists of a baptismal name followed by an adjective used cognominally²⁰¹. He is initially Perceval *li Galois*, which defines him within the context of his background (both geographically and socially), and secondly he is Perceval *li cheitis*, which defines him within the context of his actions. Even the name *Perceval* has its own connotations, as it is a name that Chrétien actively created for his character; it did not exist previous to Chrétien's romances, and it has been suggested that it may have meanings connected by phonetic coincidence with the verb *percevoir*,²⁰² which, for our purposes is rather interesting, as our discoveries thus far have proven that great importance lies in Perceval's ability to *perceive*. So with Perceval having mysteriously managed to divine his name, and Arthur having since set out in search of Perceval in order that he might learn his name, it certainly seems that during the scenes to come, this sudden step towards maturity might develop yet further. We join the narrative as Arthur's court sets up camp in a meadow beside a forest:

Au matin ot mout bien negié,
Que froide estoit mout la contree. (vv. 4162-63)

Many have interpreted this snowfall as unusual because we have a rough idea of what time of year it is. Just a few days previously it was Whitsuntide when

²⁰¹ Pickens, *The Welsh Knight*, pp. 112-13

²⁰² U. T. Holmes, *Chrétien de Troyes* (New York: Twayne, 1970), p. 69.

Clamadeu arrived at Arthur's court 'a une Pentecoste' (v. 2785). This meteorological aberration is thus difficult to understand; it may just be that Chrétien made a mistake when he wrote this scene, but it has also been suggested that it may have been included in an attempt to create a well-delineated colour contrast²⁰³, an issue which I will return to shortly.

Perceval then wakes up and goes out in search of 'aventure et chevalerie' (v. 4167), which is significant as he comes almost immediately to the field where the court has pitched its tents- the centre of all things to do with 'aventure et chevalerie', and also the antithesis of the apparently spiritual path that he seems to be following. Before he sees them, however, he is distracted by a flock of geese flying overhead:

Mes einz que il venist as tantes,
 Voloit une rote de jantes,
 Que la nois avoit esbloïes.
Veües les a et oïes,
 Qu'eles s'an aloient bruïant
 Por un faucon qui vint traïant
 Après eles de grant randon (vv. 4171-77, my emphasis)

Yet again, we see Perceval distracted by something which has alerted his senses, as is confirmed by line 4174 above. A comment on the blinding effect of the snow on the geese (v. 4173) indicates Perceval's sensory participation in their flight, that is, that he *sees* and *hears* the geese. What is interesting here is that he does not make a pre-emptive assumption about the *sound* and *sight* of them as we might expect him to, (basing our judgement on our previous experience of him) such as the noises and sounds of the knights in our first scene which prompted him to call them both devils and angels. Instead he just observes the scene as it happens:

Tant qu'il [sc. a falcon] an trova a bandon
 Une fors de rote sevreë,
 Si l'a si ferue et hurtee
 Que contre terre l'abati.
 Mes trop fu main, si s'an parti. (vv. 4178-83)

²⁰³ Armstrong, p. 130; Frappier, *Le Roman breton*, p. 69; Nitze, p. 311. Frappier and Nitze attribute this to what they describe Chrétien's fidelity to the assumed original in which a stark contrast is evident in the use of pure snow against pure blood, whilst Armstrong, though acknowledging this as a valid point, prefers to suggest that the romancer deliberately uses a strong colour contrast to express to the audience the importance of the scene, which ties together previous similar colour contrasts.

Some critics have suggested how we might consider the violence of the attack to have affected Perceval. Frappier proposes that it brings out Perceval's hunter instincts²⁰⁴, whilst Armstrong takes it one step further and submits a theory suggesting that Perceval's sexual instincts may have been aroused in view of his recent night with Blanchefleur.²⁰⁵ This theory assumes, however, that there was indeed sexual activity between Blanchefleur and Perceval, which is something that can never be proven, thus this theory may be seen as somewhat speculative. Armstrong also suggests that the falcon's action in flying off leaving the goose merely injured (and not finishing the job) actually works to emphasise how unimportant animals' motives are when compared with the far more crucial workings of man's psyche (personified through Perceval, as is about to be explored), and thus submits that a medieval audience, which would have been knowledgeable in falconry²⁰⁶, would have thought that the falcon loses much of its identity as a real animal in this scene. It becomes instead a narrative element designed to effect what comes next.²⁰⁷ One does indeed question why this episode is inserted at this point in the text, as, at first sight, a scene with a flock of geese may seem mere ornament.

It is in the next section, however, that we find out what makes this scene so crucial. Perceval immediately rides to the scene of the attack, but before he gets there:

La jante fu navree el col,
 Si seigna trois gotes de sanc.
 Qui expandirent sor le blanc,
 Si sanbla natural color.
 La jante n'ot mal ne dolor,
 Qui contre terre la tenist,
 Tant que cil a tans i venist;
 Ele s'an fu einçois volee. (vv. 4186-93)

This blood-letting episode was not an unknown motif in the Middle Ages. Zimmer (in 1881) and Frappier more recently have identified a Celtic tradition containing an

²⁰⁴ Frappier, *Le Roman breton*, p. 181.

²⁰⁵ Armstrong, p. 132.

²⁰⁶ See L. Magaud d'Aubusson, *La Fauconnerie au moyen âge et dans les temps modernes: Recherche historique, didactiques et naturelles et accompagnées de pièces justificatives* (Paris: Auguste Ghio, 1879), esp. pp. 109-10.

²⁰⁷ Armstrong, p. 131.

analogy which, they consider, would predate by roughly twenty-five years (though this date is far from definite) the composition of the *Conte du Graal*.²⁰⁸ They cite the Irish saga, *Longnes mac nUsnig*, where Deirdre, a beautiful young woman, sees a black raven drinking the blood of a freshly killed calf upon the snow, and the image reminds her of her love, Levorcham, who has black hair, rosy cheeks and white skin.²⁰⁹ As such, an audience may have had a preconceived notion of how Perceval might react to the image, and for the first time they may well have seen that he reacts at least partly as they would have expected a 'normal person' to: Perceval sees the blood drops on the snow and suddenly recognises a similarity to Blanchefleur's complexion. Some critics agree therefore, that the Irish story cited above may well be what furnished Chrétien with the analogy of blood on the snow and the beauty of the beloved²¹⁰, which whilst being entirely conceivable, does neglect the rather more important aspect of the scene, that Perceval has reached a turning point in his maturation, and the process involved in the culmination of this turning point is carefully described by Chrétien in his choice of language. The phrase 'natural color', for example, is particularly interesting as it seems to indicate the sudden figurative transfer between inanimate colours and human beauty we are about to see Perceval make in the next section. The adjective 'natural' can mean 'arising from nature', 'purity' and even 'nobility'²¹¹, and by applying an adjective resonant with human qualities to this pair of colours, the narrator predicates the analogy to human beauty that Perceval will subsequently draw²¹². Perceval's sensory reactions to the blood drops continue to dominate the scene:

Quant Percevaus vit defolee
 La noif sor quoi la jante jut
 Et le sanc qui ancor parut,
 Si s'apoia desor sa lance
 Por esgarder cele sanblance,
 Que li sans et la nois ansanble
 La fresche color li resanble
 Qui ert an la face s'amie; (vv. 4194-201)

²⁰⁸ Frappier, *Le Roman breton*, p. 68; Zimmer, p. 203.

²⁰⁹ See D. W. Robertson, ed., *The Literature of Medieval England* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970), p. 41. Note also that in *Peredur* a similar image is used to recall to the hero his beloved.

²¹⁰ See Loomis, Nitze and Vendryes.

²¹¹ T-L, LIII, 525-9; Mellen, p. 364.

²¹² Armstrong, p. 133.



This colour contrast is obviously meant to be important, as why otherwise would Chrétien linger on the details so suggestively? This implied importance may well explain his decision to include the snow at a time of the year when snow would be highly unlikely- so as to provide the striking colour contrast in the clearest terms possible. Interestingly though, where the Celtic story uses three contrasting colours, Chrétien uses only two: red and white, leaving out black. Loomis suggests this may have been so as not to cause offence to the ladies of the court, who might not have liked the comparison of a maiden's hair to the plumage of a crow.²¹³ In addition, Chrétien has reduced the actual act of blood-letting in this scene from the rather more gratuitous amounts present in similar scenes from previous stories, such as in *Longnes mac nUsnig*²¹⁴ (again possibly due to poetic taste) to a mere three drops, which may recall the lance which emits only one drop of blood at a time.²¹⁵ Instead of calling upon the audience's memory and reminding them of earlier motifs (like the lance), a scene which included abundant blood-letting would have riveted their attention on the actual act of drawing blood, which is clearly not the subject of Chrétien's interest- rather he wishes to focus the attention upon the psychological growth which Perceval will experience.²¹⁶ Where Chrétien also differs in his portrayal of this scene is that the slaughter is not the main focus of the episode; indeed the goose is able to fly off after the attack, and so the audience's attention is drawn to the essence of the scene: the colour contrast which will provoke Perceval's rapture:

Si panse tant que il s'oblie,
 Qu'autresi estoit an son vis
 Li vermauz sor le blanc assis
 Con cez trois gotes de sanc furent,
 Qui sor la blanche noif parurent.
 An l'esgarder qui il feisoit

²¹³ Loomis, p. 415; see also Frappier, *Le Roman breton*, p. 69 and Armstrong, pp. 130-31.

²¹⁴ 'Now once it chanced upon a certain day in the time of winter that the foster-father of Deirdre had employed herself in skinning a calf upon the snow, in order to prepare a roast for her, and the blood of the calf lay upon the snow, and she saw a black raven who came down to drink it. And "Levorcham", said Deirdre, "that man only will I love, who hath the three colours that I see here, his hair as black as the raven, his cheeks red like the blood, and his body as white as snow."' Robertson, p. 41.

²¹⁵ Frappier, *Le Roman breton*, p. 69.

²¹⁶ Armstrong, pp. 131-32

*Li ert avis, tant li pleisoit,
Qu'il veïst la color novele
De la face s'amie bele.*

(vv. 4202-10, my emphasis)

Chrétien has, again, made careful use of vocabulary to convey most precisely the mental processes through which Perceval goes as he falls into a deep reverie over the blood drops. *Panser* (v. 4202), for instance, implies more than a passing thought: it can also mean 'to consider', 'to reflect' or even 'to form an opinion'²¹⁷, which is highly significant to this scene. This is reflected directly in the use of *esgarder* (v. 4207), which can also mean 'to form an opinion'²¹⁸, and this most certainly is *his* (the *vaslez*'s) opinion, as is conveyed by the phrase *Li ert avis* (v. 4208), where *avis* can mean 'reflection' as well as simply 'opinion'²¹⁹. It shows that Perceval is taking the thought process one step further and he has, for the first time, made a correct sense perception, and then followed it through to the forming of an opinion through his understanding and recognition of the similarity of the blood drops to Blanchefleur's face. The fact that this is actually Perceval's own mental activity is then proven by the phrase *an son vis* (v. 4203), which tells us this is his personal perception²²⁰. Indeed, to emphasise these processes of mental activity, the narrator (and not Perceval) states three times (that is, one further time in addition to vv. 4202-06 and vv. 4207-10, cited above) the exact analogy which Perceval draws between the blood drops and Blanchefleur:

*Que li sans et la nois ansanble
La fresche color li resanble
Qui ert an la face s'amie;* (vv. 4199-201)

This repetition convinces the audience that the *jeune nice*²²¹ is quite capable of not just *seeing*, but also *interiorising* the images he sees. Most significantly he does indeed *see* and *interiorise* a symbolic representation of his absent love within a physical reality. Particularly interesting here is the use of the verb *s'oblier*, which suggests a particular type of reflection. Tobler-Lommatzsch suggests that it can

²¹⁷ T-L, VII, 668-79: my translations of *überlegen*, *erwägen* and *urteilen* (definitions given by T-L of *penser*) respectively.

²¹⁸ T-L, III, 1062-64, from *urteilen*.

²¹⁹ T-L, I, 739-740, from *Überlegung* and *Meinung* respectively.

²²⁰ T-L, XI (3. Lieferung), 538-45. *vis*= *Sehvermögen* or 'ability to see'.

²²¹ Armstrong, p. 134.

mean simply 'to lose consciousness', but that it can also mean 'to lose self-control'. In addition, it bears the interesting connotation of 'to entertain oneself'²²². It is perhaps the case that all three can be applied to Perceval, as from the outside world, he does appear to have lost consciousness, and he does so as if it is somehow beyond his control, however, he clearly does take great pleasure in the trance. Perhaps even more importantly, the term can bear the connotation of a meditative kind of love, whereby one can be entirely lost in contemplation at the thought of one's lover²²³ - which is precisely the Perceval we see here. All of these definitions have valid explanations, and however we choose to understand it, it is clear that Chrétien means this word to be somewhat ambiguous. Perceval does not simply stop and think about how the blood drops resemble Blanchefleur - there is something else at work that somehow makes him stop and muse upon their appearance and also, upon the process via which they bring to mind an image he has seen in the past.

There is, in addition, another obvious question to be answered here, however. Whilst Perceval does recognise the similarity of the blood drops to Blanchefleur's face, he does not openly recall an episode, also similar in appearance, which has more recently happened to him (as we briefly touched upon when considering what the audience would associate with the blood drops, cf. p. 100). It is, of course, the episode of the white lance which emits blood drops. Indeed, he even leans on his own lance to take a closer look at the blood drops (vv. 4196-97) and *still* does not notice the connection. An audience may well notice the similarity, but as far as we can tell, Perceval does not. Perhaps it is actually the case that there is a kind of subconscious recollection by Perceval, as this red-white contrast is something which has appeared several times in the text, for example, the knights' armour in the very first scene (v. 131), the tent (vv. 641-48), the red knight (v. 872), Blanchefleur's face (vv. 1823-25) and the bleeding lance (vv. 3197-98). By underlining the importance of the colour pairs in previous scenes, the narrator invests Perceval's trance with a complexity which cannot escape the audience. The trance may be usefully viewed as

²²² T-L, VI, 950-52, from *die Besinnung verlieren*, *die Fassung verlieren* and *sich zerstreuen* respectively.

²²³ T-L, VI, 950-52, *nachdenken*.

a kind of delayed reaction to previous impressions which have affected Perceval without his realising it. This is clearly a vital turning point, as it is the final culmination of Perceval's perceptions of particular objects, most of which appear to conform to the same colour scheme. He suddenly appears able to *see*, *interiorise* and therefore, *understand* the higher significance of an object, e.g. that an object may be associated with an unrelated object by means of similar appearance. He is now capable of being both receptive and reflective, where he has been incapable before, and can at last penetrate the *monde des apparences*²²⁴. Perceval's sensory participation in the event is also emphasised by the narrator again (as we have seen in previous scenes) repeating the verb *veoir* throughout the scene, for example: 'Et Percevaus comance a poindre/ La ou il ot veü le vol.' (vv. 4184-85, my emphasis). In this first part of the scene, the context of this verb seems initially to define only the act of seeing the blood drops, but the verb gains a higher importance as the scene progresses; it is not just that he *sees* the physical object before him, it is that he also *sees* the similarity of that with another object. So in the latter part of the scene, this verb *veoir* begins to equate not just to perception, but also to the understanding of something. In addition, the repetition of the verb seems all the more deliberate when we note that it is the narrator, rather than the hero, who first delineates the colour contrast of the blood on the snow²²⁵ (see vv. 4186-89 above), as Perceval becomes effectively unconscious ('il s'oblie', v. 4202, as previously discussed) in his reverie and would be unable to articulate the operation of sensory stimuli on him.²²⁶

Percevaus sor les gotes muse,
Tote la matinee i use
Tant que fors des tantes issirent
Escuiier qui muser le virent,
Si cuidierent qu'il someillast. (vv. 4211-15, my emphasis)

Suddenly it is no longer merely the narrator who is viewing the trance into which Perceval has fallen. Now other outside points of view will be added to support the

²²⁴ Frappier, *Le Roman breton*, p. 70.

²²⁵ This could also be read as a case of *discours indirect libre*, which does raise interesting questions regarding point-of-view, but seeing as so far we have seen no instances where Perceval has been unable to effectively articulate the images he sees, then it is arguable that these words come directly from the narrator, especially considering Perceval's current state of reverie. It seems that it is only once Perceval has awoken from his trance that he is able to communicate effectively.

²²⁶ Armstrong, p. 133.

fact that the trance and its considerable duration are in fact true and precisely as the narrator has described: note in line 4214 that they *see* (*virent*) him and believe that he is asleep. This is (from what the narrator has told us) erroneous, but it establishes beyond a doubt just how deep Perceval's meditation is, and it also represents some sort of a reversal of roles. Where previously if Perceval *saw* something, he would interpret it wrongly, now it is others who are *seeing* things and making incorrect assumptions. It is interesting, once again, to examine Chrétien's use of vocabulary which suggests a particular type of reflection: *muser*, for example, is the verb upon which Chrétien insists by his repetition of it. It does simply mean 'to ponder', but it can also mean 'to be astonished or amazed'²²⁷, which would signal to an audience, that this is a vision that is in some way extraordinary, so much so that Perceval is actually *amazed* by it (v. 4211 and v. 4214). In any case, Chrétien makes it quite clear with this word what it is that Perceval is *not* doing- he is *not* asleep (*il someillast*, v. 4215), as the courtiers suspect, which lends further weight to the argument that appearances are not always what they seem, and that it is necessary to look *beyond* appearances to ascertain truth and understanding. Whilst Perceval seems now capable of doing this, others seem incapable, which signals the fact that he has somehow surpassed in mental activity the capabilities of others.

What adds to this is another shift in the episode: Arthur sends Sagremor and Kay in turn to bring this unknown knight before him, but again, they *misinterpret* what Perceval is doing, as they look only at what he *appears* to be doing, failing to consider what it is he is *actually* doing, each in turn meeting with failure in their task. Let us look firstly at Sagremor's attempt. He begins not by asking, but by telling Perceval to come to court: '«Sire, fet il, il vos *covient*/ Venir a cort»' (vv. 4244-45). This is most definitely not an example of gracious knightly behaviour. Perceval ignores him, as he is still caught up in his trance. Sagremor then threatens to take him by force. Still he makes no response, and so, Sagremor charges at him. Perceval looks up and spurs against him:

A ce que li uns l'autre ancontre,

²²⁷ T-L, VI, 455-59, translated from *nachsinnen* and *staunen* respectively.

Sagremors sa lance peçoie,
 La Perceval ne frait ne ploie,
 Einçois l'anpait de tel vertu
 Qu'anmi le champ l'a abatu. (vv.4264-68)

It is almost as if Perceval, with his new found maturity, has become in some way invincible, now seeming to be considerably superior to this other knight. Sagremor returns to court where Kay is mocking his attempt, so Arthur sends the latter to try his luck. During this time, Perceval has returned to his contemplation of the blood drops, again seemingly in some sort of a trance that distracts his attention from all else, reconfirming the significance of the image. Even after the conflict, Perceval is able to return directly to the contemplation of this important phenomenon:

Celui qui tant antandoit
 As trois gotes qu'il esgardoit,
 Qu'il n'avoit d'autre chose soing. (vv. 4291-93)

Kay threatens Perceval that he will attack if Perceval does not come to court. Perceval reacts immediately, and again easily defeats his opponent, breaking his arm. This turns out to be the subject of a prophecy foretold by the jester:

Et Percevaus pas ne se faint,
 Desor la bocle an haut l'ataint,
 Si l'abati sor une roche
 Que la chanole li esloche
 Et qu'antre le code et l'eissele
 Ausi come une seche estele
 L'os del braz destre li brisa,
 Si con li fos le devisa
 Qui maintes foiz deviné l'ot:
 Voirs fu li devinaus au sot. (vv. 4307-16)

Of course we remember that Perceval has vowed to avenge the maiden who Kay slapped, and he has done so here, albeit unwittingly as he did not know the identity of his opponent. This confirms the significance of destiny- the fact that this vengeance has come to fruition, in spite of the fact that it was claimed without the avenger actually knowing, tells us that destiny is something which cannot be escaped, especially when we consider that this particular episode was also foretold in a prophecy. And it is deeply significant that this happens in this scene (where Perceval appears to have at last made his largest step in progress so far), as it underlines all the more that our hero has not only progressed, but also reached a

particular turning point: the maiden who Kay slapped has been avenged, Perceval's position in court is now such that he must be asked, and not told, to come to court (as we shall see with Gauvain), and Perceval has shown himself capable of both the reception of and reflection on objects.

Again, Perceval returns directly to his reverie on the blood drops, whilst the king is distressed about the injuries that Kay has endured. Gauvain seems able, where others have been unable, to look beyond the surface appearance of what Perceval is doing and suggests that perhaps their approaches have therefore been inappropriate; he reminds Arthur of his own advice:

«Sire, se Damedeus m'aït,
Il n'est reisons, bien le savez,
Si con vos meïsmes l'avez
Toz jorz dir et jugié a droit,
Que chevaliers autre ne doit
Oster, si con cil dui ont fet,
De son panser, quel qu'il l'et. (vv. 4350-56)

Kay then mocks Gauvain, saying that he will be able to bring the knight back without being harmed, but not because of diplomacy, rather because the knight will be wearied after his previous two combats. The king praises Gauvain for his courtesy and sends him to the knight as an embassy, which emphasises the fact that Perceval is now of such a position that he must be revered and *asked* for his presence at court and not *ordered* to attend, as someone inferior might be. Chrétien in fact confirms in lines 4419-20 ('Cil qui de totes les bontez/ Ot los et pris,') that Gauvain would have been as known to the medieval audience for his courtesy and virtues as Kay would have been for his irascibility and rudeness- thus he is clearly the right candidate to approach Perceval. When Gauvain then does approach Perceval, the latter is still transfixed by the blood drops, but the sun has melted them away and he is coming out of his trance. Note that suddenly, instead of a direct sensory gratification being pleasing to Perceval, it is in fact the *process of thought* in considering a sensory gratification which is pleasing to him (v. 4424). This is embodied in the word *panser* upon which there is a continued insistence, as we can see here:

Et vint au chevalier tot droit,
 Qui sor sa lance ert apoiiez,
 N'ancor n'estoit pas enuiiez
 De son *pansé*, que mout li *plot*.
 Et neporquant li solauz ot
 Deus des gotes del sanc remises,
 Qui sor la noif furent assises,
 Et la tierce aloit remetant;
 Por ce ne *pansoit* mie tant
 Li chevaliers come il ot fet. (vv. 4421-31, my emphasis)

Because Gauvain's approach is courteous, and at least partly because Perceval is now conscious, he replies to Gauvain's request for him to come to court. At last Perceval explains the mechanism of the trance, proving that despite the fact the blood drops have disappeared, he is still able to reflect on their significance even though they are absent from his actual sight, and only present in his mind's eye. Interestingly, his account does not differ greatly from the narrator's. Indeed, he is made to use much of the same vocabulary and constructions, particularly in his continued insistence on words like *panser*, *esgarder* and *avis*, as well as the fact that Perceval is enjoying this particular process:

Et je estoie si *pansis*
 D'un *panser* qui mout me pleisoit.
 Et cil qui partir m'an voloit
 N'aloit mie querant mon preu;
 Que devant moi an icest leu
 Avoit trois gotes de fres sanc,
 Qui anluminoient le blanc.
 An l'*esgarder* m'estoit *avis*
 Que la fresche color del vis
 M'amie la bele i *veïsse*,
 Ne ja partir ne m'an queïsse. (vv. 4446-56)

Note in line 4453, Perceval again expresses his own *avis*, and uses the subjunctive to convey the fact that it was to him as if his love's face were actually in front of him- and not merely the blood drops which happen to be made up of similar colours. The audience's attention is drawn again to the luminosity engendered by colours- which has evidently been the thing which has drawn Perceval in so deeply. Indeed, he has never before given evidence to suggest that he can be so articulate in his vocabulary as to use words such as *anluminoient* (v. 4452). This is, after all, a new side of someone we have previously seen mute at the Grail castle. The use of this word,

anluminoient, also suggests the extent of his present reflectiveness and his sharpening perceptions. This ability to articulate complex reflections translates dramatically the current stage of his psychological development. He has now reached the step of *courtois* development which seems to project him into an awareness of spiritual and moral relationships.²²⁸ Indeed, we know that Gauvain has previously recognised the superiority of a knight caught up in his thoughts, as Arthur had taught him (vv. 4352-56, see above), and that one should therefore not disturb a knight's thoughts. Here, however Gauvain goes a step even further to fully remove any taint of stupidity in Perceval's behaviour:

Cist pansers n'estoit pas vilains,
Einz estoit mout cortois et douz;
Et cil estoit fos et estouz
Qui vostre cuer²²⁹ an removoit. (vv. 4458-61)

He has reached the highest rung of *courtoisie*, as defined by Gauvain and of which Gauvain has, until now, been the epitome. We may expect, though, that Perceval will now go on to surpass Gauvain, by achieving the spiritual as well as the chivalric, though we have as yet no evidence of this. The scene sums up previous motifs, integrates them into a more dense and comprehensible texture, and focuses their meaning in such a manner that it becomes eminently credible that Perceval may now achieve spiritual goals, such as the attainment of the Grail. Perceval's development again fits very nicely into our table of childhood (cf. p. 50), where he appears to have reached the highest stage of childhood development (the stage of *adolescencia*), and thus verging on the edge of adulthood. The particular aspects expected of a child at this stage of development are displayed quite plainly in Perceval's behaviour: he is receptive to the influences of educators and religion (he follows advice given by Gornemant), but is also capable of making his own decisions (in choosing to muse on the blood drops rather than continue on in search

²²⁸ c.f. Armstrong, p.137. Armstrong suggests that this occurs through the 'love experience' with Blanchefleur- I believe, however, that it is rather his numerous confrontations with objects that have sparked off the learning process (that is, through his childish interest in pretty things) and thus catapulted him into a consciousness which surpasses mere contemplation of physical phenomena.

²²⁹ It is an interesting point that Gauvain thinks that it is Perceval's heart that has been stimulated through his *pansers*, whereas we have been led to assume that it is actually his mind- the narrator has used vocabulary that suggests that Perceval, rather than anything else, is enjoying the process of thought.

of *aventure et chevalerie*), and taking responsibility for them (in his explanation of the reasons for his actions to Gauvain), thus utilising the fully developed power of judgment, that he (assuming, of course, that he *is* at this stage of development) would be expected to have. He has full knowledge of his identity (now that he has divined his name), and most importantly recognises the significance of an object other than its simple function (in his association of the blood drops with Blanchefleur's face). In addition, according to the hierarchy of faculties, Perceval seems to display the characteristics of someone who has achieved the highest faculty, *intelligence*. That is, he knows that a thing exists in perpetuity within the divine thought and endures beyond the material creation, which, in the context of this scene, is demonstrated by the fact that he first sees the blood drops (or perceives them via his *wits* or *sensus communis*), he recognises what they are, as he has seen blood drops before (using the faculty of *imagination*), he reflects upon them and notices their similarity to his love's complexion (thus divorcing the colours from matter and placing them in a new context as is possible when in possession of faculty of *reason*), and even when they are gone, he is still able to understand their significance- as they also exist in perpetuity in his mind (thus arriving at the highest faculty: *intelligence*). There can be no doubt, then, that this is the culmination in Perceval's development, which will be expressed at its fullest in the scene in which we see him with the Hermit.

Conclusion

Having mapped Perceval's personal development thus far, it is perhaps time to remind ourselves where it is we have actually arrived. What has Perceval actually become as a result of his encounter with the blood drops on the snow?

He has, first and foremost, become both receptive to, and able to reflect upon, various stimuli. Thus, he has fulfilled those expectations that we formed about what would have been necessary to be considered mature in the Middle Ages: he is, at last, in possession of those characteristics which were thought to amount to maturity. That is, he is able to perceive *and* to simultaneously understand the significance of that perception. This is something which is essential if one is to be defined as having reached the stage of *adolescentia*²³⁰ and as being in possession of the elusive faculty of *intelligence*²³¹.

Let us look systematically, then, at the chronology and progression that has brought us to this point:

1. When we first meet Perceval, he is an ignorant, churlish youth in the forest, uninformed of chivalry and knighthood, having been mentored only by his mother who, it seems, has purposefully left out important parts of his education, such that he is unable to fully comprehend the world around him.

On meeting the knights, we learn that his ability to *understand* only goes as

²³⁰ By way of a reminder, the stage of *adolescentia* involves having a higher predilection to sin, but also being able to take responsibility for that, such as he is about to do in his encounter with the Hermit. One should also become more receptive to influences from educators and religion, which again can be seen in Perceval's newfound ability to accept and understand lessons, like in his encounter with the Hermit. There is a further development in the power of judgment and the formation of personality and identity should also be complete. Most importantly, one should be able to perceive and fully understand various symbols and objects. All of these characteristics do indeed appear to fit the Perceval who finds himself confronted with a group of penitents in the forest after five years of aimless wandering. (cf. p. 50)

²³¹ *Intelligence* is the faculty possessed only by divine Providence, which involves knowing that a thing exists in perpetuity beyond the material creation, as a kind of immortal image, such as Perceval has been able to imagine Blanche fleur's face (without actually needing her to be standing before him) and notice the resemblance between her complexion and the blood drops on the snow. Indeed, the image and the effect of the blood drops remains with him even after they have melted with the snow. (cf. p. 56)

far as the actual *perception* of something and the learning of its name. He does not really seek significance. For example, he sees the armour and *perceives* that it is shiny, but he is entirely incapable of *understanding* its higher significance: that it is a symbol of knighthood and of the sort of chivalric acts that a knight must carry out to achieve prowess and renown. All he knows is that the armour is attractive and therefore his infantile urges tell him that he, too, wants some armour- so he sets off in search of it.²³²

2. When Perceval encounters the Maiden in the Tent, he is still heavily reliant on the advice of his mother. He is also still very much at the stage of the mere perception of objects, *seeing* the tent and recognising merely that it is attractive. However, inside the tent, he shows that he can also *recall* objects and recognise the identity of similar ones- such as the pies: they are not precisely the same pies he has seen before, but nevertheless, their similarity in appearance leads him to recognise them as pies. In addition he also displays certain base urges in his instinctual desires for actual food rather than spiritual sustenance.²³³
3. At the Grail Castle, whilst still unable to fully comprehend significances, Perceval is suddenly able to identify not only the name, but also the quality of an object. For example, when he sees the Grail, he notes that the stones in it are of the finest quality- so not only does he know that they are called 'stones', but he also recognises that they are rather exceptional stones. However, even though he acknowledges what a wondrous object the Grail is, he never actually *understands* that it has a higher significance- indeed, even had he asked the question ('whom does the Grail serve?') it would still have been the function rather than the significance that he was enquiring about. His reason for not asking the question seems to be because Gornemant has told him to not talk too much. So, whilst Perceval has absorbed this, his

²³² This places him in the first sub-stage of *infantia*, though also on the cusp of the second sub-stage (cf. p. 50). It also tells us that he only has access to the faculty of *sensus communis*, using only his senses to perceive (cf. p. 55).

²³³ Here, he is in possession of all the characteristics expected of the second sub-stage of *infantia* (cf. p. 50) and this ability to recall and identify similar objects is characteristic of the faculty of *imagination* (cf. pp. 55-56).

understanding is rather superficial and altogether too literal, thus he follows the letter and not the spirit of the advice. So, whilst at this stage he does know that objects may have qualities which make them in some way better than other similar objects, he still does not comprehend the true significance of objects and indeed, lessons, beyond their function and surface appearance.²³⁴

4. When Perceval encounters the blood drops, for the first time he sees something more than just the object itself. Indeed, whilst he is able to *perceive* and to *understand* that these are blood drops, he can also *reflect* upon them and recognise their higher significance- that they bear a resemblance to his love's complexion.²³⁵

Thus, what Perceval has effectively learned is that objects are not just interesting in themselves; rather, they are interesting *beyond* themselves. Their great significance is in their meanings and, most importantly, what they actually inspire in Perceval himself- such that he may actually *lose himself* in the contemplation of them, just as he does when he sees the blood drops on the snow (*il s'oblie...*, v. 4202). In fact, the blood drops inspire such a reverie in Perceval that he is able to relate the material image to the abstract image, and thus attain a kind of perceptive or spiritual maturity.

What it seems has been happening up until this point in the romance, then, is that Perceval has not simply undergone a standard learning process, such as just any child might; rather, he has experienced a specific process of development²³⁶: a kind

²³⁴ The characteristics he displays at this point place him in the childhood stage of *pueritia* (cf. p. 50) and his ability to distinguish between objects according to their quality is a feature of the faculty of *reason* (cf. p. 56).

²³⁵ As previously noted, at this point Perceval has reached the stage of *adolescentia* (cf. p. 50) and, due to his ability to recognise that an object exists and has meaning beyond itself implies that Perceval has obtained the faculty of *intelligence* (cf. p. 56).

²³⁶ Rupert T. Pickens acknowledges this gradual development: 'Before the crucial events at the Hermitage, the hero had grown from innocence to maturity by cultivating, consciously and unconsciously', '*Le Conte du Graal (Perceval)*' in *The Romances of Chrétien du Troyes: A Symposium*, ed. by Douglas Kelly (Lexington, KY: French Forum, 1985), pp. 232-86 (p. 253).

of psychological preparation or qualification for the ultimate task that he must seek to achieve, which we assume to be the attainment of the Grail²³⁷.

Before he can achieve this ultimate task, however, it seems he must receive another lesson. In the past, as we have just seen, Perceval has come into contact with several 'mentors', all of whom have attempted to impart information, or more precisely, specific advice or lessons to Perceval. These have included his mother- Perceval's sole informant for the first part of his life- Gornemant, the 'prodome' who taught him the ways of chivalry, and his cousin, who tells him of the sin that has prevented his success at the Grail castle. From these mentors he takes away certain pieces of advice that he certainly *seems* to try to put to good use, but it is rare that he applies the advice correctly in the right situations. For example, as we have seen, when he remains silent at the Grail castle, he believes that it is because Gornemant has told him he should not talk too much; when he kisses the Tent Maiden and takes her ring, he does it because he thinks his mother has said he may. And whilst it is true that, in one way or another, they have said these things, this is not precisely what they have meant. Rather, this is what was on the surface of their words, and not what was behind them. Much like his reactions to objects, Perceval has tended to absorb only the facade of what his mentors have advised him rather than the import, or, in other words, he accepts the letter rather than the spirit or significance of their advice.²³⁸

At last though, thanks ultimately, it seems, to his encounter with the blood drops (though also to the many other encounters with objects which have fuelled the entire maturation process that we have described), he has been somehow spiritually and perceptively prepared to be fully receptive not only to objects, but also to lessons which have a higher significance, and this, it seems, comes to fruition in the final scene in which we see Perceval. Having achieved both emotional and chivalric

²³⁷ That Perceval would have returned to the Grail Castle, had the romance been finished, is a view widely held by many critics, see, amongst others, Pickens, *Le Conte du Graal*, p. 253; Maddox, *The Anterior Order*, p. 111; Duggan, p. 128.

²³⁸ For an excellent explanation of precisely what Perceval takes from his mentors' advice, see Lacy, who concentrates on the mother, Gornemant and the Hermit, p. 106; Pickens also takes into account the Roi Pêcheur in his *The Welsh Knight*, p. 50.

maturity, Perceval, as we have said, is now *spiritually* and *perceptively* mature²³⁹, and therefore ready and primed for his meeting with the Hermit, where he will have to understand the higher significance of the Hermit's advice²⁴⁰. Let us look then at exactly what advice it is that the Hermit imparts to Perceval, how he understands it and what it is that he takes away from it.

It seems that Perceval has been wandering aimlessly for five years, committing acts which involve *requerre chevalerie* (v. 6226), but having forgotten both God and the vow he made to return to the Grail castle whilst he was at Arthur's court. What is interesting is that Perceval has not yet come across a task he could not complete:

... et s'an trova
Tant que mout bien s'i esprova,
N'onques n'anprist chose si grief
Dont il ne venist bien a chief. (vv. 6229-32)

The irony here, of course, being that whilst he can commit many acts which require chivalric maturity, he has not yet completed perhaps the most important task of all in not returning to the Grail Castle and asking the vital question that would restore health and wealth to the *Roi Pêcheur*, his land and his people. Although he seems to have reached every kind of maturity conceivable, there is clearly still some tool missing that he needs if he is going to complete that task.

One day in the forest he comes across a group of penitents, barefoot and dressed in hairshirts. They are shocked to see him armed so on what is apparently Good Friday. On hearing this, Perceval asks '-Et don venez vos ore *einsi*?' (v. 6301, my emphasis), making us wonder if Perceval has perhaps reverted to the old Perceval, preoccupied solely with surface appearance: he wants to know where they have

²³⁹ Uitti and Freeman explain that it is a combination of all of these kinds of maturity, and not a denouncement of the lesser maturities that may lead Perceval to success, and in this way, 'Perceval comes to know a new and genuine freedom', p. 124.

²⁴⁰ This is a scene which has been viewed in many different ways by various critics. Topsfield, for example, merely summarises the action of the scene without making any real assertions as to its meaning, p. 278-80, much as does Frappier in his *Chrétien de Troyes et le mythe du Graal: Etude sur 'Perceval' ou 'Le Conte du Graal'* (Paris: Société d'édition d'enseignement supérieur, 1979), pp. 148-58; Lacy suggests that the 'content and the meaning of the first scene are reflected in the hermit episode', p. 103, whilst Maddox associates it with 'the new written law' which Christ gave to his followers as a mandate, as Perceval moves 'from a total ignorance of laws to a mastery of a set of orally transmitted customs that serve as laws', *The Anterior Order*, p. 112.

come from *dressed this way*. The fact that he does not have sufficiently profound perceptual capabilities to automatically understand why the penitents might be dressed so further adds to our suggestion that Perceval is still in need of one vital lesson to complete his education. Upon hearing that they have been at the home...

D'un buen home, d'un sainte hermite,
 Qui an ceste forest abite,
 N'il ne vit, tant par est sainz hon,
 Se de la gloire del ciel non. (vv. 6303-06)

Perceval is overcome with an intense curiosity, rather reminiscent of his former self, as he was in the initial scene with the five knights. He questions: '-Por Deu, seignor, la que feïstes?/ Que demandastes? Que queïstes?' (vv. 6307-08). This repetitive structure of questioning draws our attention to the importance of these questions. Each in turn, the three questions express an interest firstly in acts, secondly in speech and thirdly in purpose. Perceval does not actually question the significance of what the penitents have been doing. However, on finding out that they have been to confess their sins because it is what a Christian must do 'Qui vuelle a Damedeu retreire.' (v. 6314), he weeps- a very emotional and physical reaction to their story- but this time, his reaction is not fuelled by some kind of sensory gratification, rather it is the meaning behind the penitents' actions that causes him to react so. That is, if one is guilty of a sin, one must confess it so to be absolved. Perceval already knows that he has committed a sin- both his cousin and the Hideous Damsel have told him so²⁴¹, and yet he has never been to confess. The emotion he feels seems to be guilt- a recognition that he has committed sins, which is a considerable progression from the distinct *lack* of guilt he felt for his sins in such scenes as the Tent Scene²⁴². He appears therefore to have become *receptive* to significance, at least, that is, when it is *pointed out* (as demonstrated by his weeping upon hearing what it is to confess your sins), even though he does not quite yet have the tools to recognise it *autonomously*. This confirms what we have already suggested, that Perceval is *intuitively* mature but in need of one final push and now, we assume, has come the

²⁴¹ Pickens draws our attention to the fact that although both the cousin and the Hideous Damsel have offered Perceval advice, he has needed a further prod to actually act upon this advice, *Le Conte du Graal*, p. 255.

²⁴² He shows no real remorse for his violation of the Tent Maiden.

time when he is ready to accept the significance of objects and lessons, and most particularly at this juncture, the Hermit's lesson. This, we presume, will furnish him with the final tool in his education such that he can accomplish the ultimate task, whereby one must be at the height of perceptive maturity if one is to achieve it.

Perceval decides he too must confess his sins and asks how he might find the Hermit, and upon receiving the instructions, he immediately sets off to find him:

Et Percevaus el santier antre,
Qui sospire del cuer del vandre²⁴³
Por ce que mesfez se santoit
Vers Deu, don mout se repantoit. (vv. 6333-37)

This again affirms the fact that Perceval, at last, fully acknowledges his sins and wishes to repent of them, now understanding the significance of what it is to repent. It shows us his readiness to open his mind to whatever he needs to learn to become successful in his destiny, that is, that somewhat cloudy and inexplicit destiny which has been reiterated as being his by the Roi Pêcheur, the Jester at Arthur's court and many other characters throughout the romance.

When Perceval finds the Hermitage he, rather interestingly, immediately removes all his armour- that is, all those things which previously served to define him as a knight. This demonstrates an even further step away from the Perceval of the initial scene with the five knights, as, after having so desperately wanted to wear the shiny armour, he now understands that he does not need the armour here. Even without it, he is *still* a knight because the chivalric deeds he has carried out have not suddenly been erased because he has removed the outward appearance of knighthood. That is to say, having coveted armour so passionately and felt (with the *Chevalier Vermeil* and in his rush to Arthur's court) that it *defines* knighthood, he now accepts that his *self* is defined by *acts* and not by *externals*. He also has no need of the armour as he is before God and He sees the higher significances behind surface appearance

²⁴³ We might notice here the repetition of a phrase used at the very beginnings of Perceval's development (v. 86, cf. p. 16), which shows that Perceval is still capable of the same rather physical reactions, though now he reacts to very different things. Previously it was surface appearance and sensory gratifications that caused him to react so, now it is the fact that he *understands* the significance of that which he must do, which is to confess.

without needing to have *seen* some sort of a facade to *understand* the true meaning. Perceval then enters a small chapel²⁴⁴ where a service is just beginning. The Hermit calls him over and Perceval takes him by the foot and begs for absolution. The Hermit suggests he confess if he is to be absolved. Perceval tells the Hermit:

...bien a cinc anz
 Que je ne soi ou je me fui,
 Ne Deu n'amai ne Deu ne crui,
 N'onques puis ne fis se mal non. (vv. 6364-67)

Thus, he shows his full understanding of the sins he has committed and why they are wrong. This is further emphasised when he explains his sins at the Grail castle: he places emphasis on the sins *he* now knows that *he* has committed. Indeed, they are often placed at the rhyme:

-Sire, chiés le roi Pescheor
 Fui une foiz et *vi la lance*
 Don li fers saine sanz dotance,
 Et de cele gote de sanc
 Que de la pointe del fer blanc
 Vi pandre, *rien n'an demandai*:
 Onques puis, certes, *n'amandai*.
 Et del graal que *je i vi*
 Ne soi pas cui l'an an servi,
 S'an ai puis eü si grant duel
 Que morz eüsse esté mon vuel,
 Et Damedeu an *obliai*,
 Qu'ainz puis merci ne li criai,
 Ne ne fis rien que *je seüsse*
 Par quoi ja mes merci eüsse. (vv. 6372-86, my emphasis)

The Hermit then asks for his name, and when he hears it, he is able to inform Perceval why he has suffered this affliction. It is, as he has already been told by his cousin, because of the *sin*²⁴⁵ he committed in leaving his mother for dead at the very beginning of his adventures, though, it seems he is only now able to accept and understand this information, whereas with the cousin he seemed, in many ways, to have not heard it, as he did not even pass comment on it (see vv. 3428-690). The Hermit also tells Perceval that the only reason he has not yet been killed in some way is because his mother has commended him to God:

²⁴⁴ Interestingly, he automatically seems to know that this is a chapel, unlike in his encounter with the Tent Maiden.

²⁴⁵ It is important here that both Perceval and the Hermit describe what Perceval has done as a sin (*pechié*, v. 6399): for the first time Perceval perceives and understands a situation in precisely the same way as does another character.

Por le *pechié* que tu an as
 T'avint que tu ne demandas
 De la lance ne del graal,
 Si t'an sont venu maint mal,
 Ne n'eüsses pas tant duré,
 S'ele ne t'eüst comandé
 A Damedeu, ce saches tu. (vv. 6399-405, my emphasis)

The Hermit then, as if seeing that Perceval is now ready and prepared to receive the information he is in need of to complete his education, enlightens him as to all he wishes to know about the Grail. Before he does this, however, he informs Perceval that he, the Hermit, is in fact brother to Perceval's mother, and that the Roi Pêcheur is the son of their other brother. It is apparently this brother who is the one served from the grail:

Mes ne cuidiez pas que il et
 Luz ne lamproies ne saumon:
 D'une sole oïste li sainz hon,
 Que l'an an cest graal li porte,
 Sa vie sostient et conforte;
Tant sainte chose est li graaus,
 Et il est si esperitaus
 Qu'a sa vie plus ne covient
 Que l'oïste qui el graal vient. (vv. 6420-28, my emphasis)

It seems that the Grail, by way of a host contained within it, has for many years sustained the Roi Pêcheur's father and the Grail is *tant sainte chose*. In his initial stages of development, Perceval often mistook the earthly for the divine (such as the tent for a church, and the knights for angels), although not truly understanding the meaning of that divinity; conversely though, with the Grail, he did not appear to make any such religious assumptions, merely considering how beautiful an object it was. Now that he has had the psychological preparation that we have talked about, he is actually ready to accept not only the significance of the Grail being divine, but also the significance of the lesson that the Hermit wishes to teach. So, when the Hermit then says 'Or te vuel anjoindre et doner/ Penitance de ton pechié.' (v. 6432-33), Perceval accepts the undertaking of his penance willingly, understanding that he must do as his uncle suggests if he is to achieve the tools he needs to complete the task: '-Biaus oncle, ainsi le vuel gié' (v. 6434).

The Hermit then lays down the rules to which Perceval must adhere if he is to truly repent²⁴⁶:

Se de t'ame pitiez te prant,
Si aies an toi repantance,
Et va el non de penitance
Au mostier einz qu'an autre leu
Chascun jor, si i avras preu,
Et si ne leisse por nul plet,
Se tu es an leu ou il et
Mostier, chapele ne parroche,
Va la quant sonera la cloche
Ou einçois, se tu es levez:
Ja de ce ne seras grevez,
Einz an iert mout t'ame avanciee.
Et se la messe est comanciee,
Tant i fera il meillor estre:
Tant i demore que li prestre
Avra tot dit et tot chanté.
Se ce te vient a volanté,²⁴⁷
Ancor porras monter an pris,
S'avras enor et paradis.
Deu croi, Deu aime, Deu aore,
Buen home et buene fame enore,
Contre le provoire te lieve;
C'est uns servises qui po grieve,
Et Deus l'aime por verité
Por ce qu'il vient d'umilité.
Se pucele aïe te quiert,
Aïe li, que miauz t'an iert,
Ou veve dame ou orfeline; (vv. 6444-67, my emphasis)

The italicised sections above are rather reminiscent of the advice his mother offered him before he left home in search of *aventure* (cf. pp. 58-59 for a full citation of her words). For example, the first piece of advice about going to church every day corresponds to his mother's advice that he should:

Sor tote rien vos vuel proier
Que an yglise et an mostier
Alez proier nostre Seignor, (vv. 568-70)

The Hermit then recommends that he should honour gentlemen and noble ladies.

This echoes what Perceval's mother said about keeping company with 'prodomes':

²⁴⁶ It is through this penance that the Hermit frees Perceval from the consequences of his sin and thus rehabilitates him. Erec and Yvain, conversely, were able to attain this rehabilitation by merely undergoing successfully a series of knightly tests, thus setting Perceval even further apart from the realms of knighthood. For further discussion, see Duggan, p. 123.

²⁴⁷ Lines 6459-60 are very interesting as they once again underline the importance of *understanding*. Perceval ought not do these things because he *should* do them, rather, he should do them because he wishes to do so- there is, after all, no point in going to church if only for the superficial purpose of physically being there- there should also be a spiritual element to attending.

Biaus filz, as prodomes parlez,
 Avuec les prodomes alez:
 Prodon ne forsconseille mie
 Çaus qui tienent sa conpeignie. (vv. 564-67)

And finally, the Hermit's suggestion that Perceval should offer assistance to maidens, orphans and widows also finds a kind of mirror image in the mother's words:

Se vos trovez ne pres ne loing
 Dame qui d'aïe et besoing,
 Ne pucele desconseilliee,
 La vostre aïe apareilliee
 Lor soit, s'eles vos an requierent,
 Que totes enors i afierent. (vv. 533-38)

However, whereas when Perceval's mother offered him the advice, he simply accepted the surface of what she had said, and often applied the advice incorrectly and in the wrong situations, with the Hermit we have a sense that Perceval is mature enough to accept more than the mere letter of this advice- he will now also follow the spirit. He also accepts the fact that he may be sustained by simple foods, such as the Hermit enjoys, where before he was often distracted from his purpose at the thought of food, for example at the Grail castle, where instead of asking the question he busies himself with enjoying the feast: 'Einsi la chose a respitíee,/ S'antant a boivre et a mangier;' (vv. 3310-11). This new side of Perceval, whereby he can *understand* significance above surface appearance, is affirmed narratively, as well as thematically, by the following passage:

Einsi Percevaus *reconut*
 Que Deus au vandredi reçut
 Mort et si fu crocefiiez;
 A la pasque comeniiez
 Fu Percevaus *mout dignemant*. (vv. 6509-13, my emphasis)

Perceval *understands* (as shown by the insistence on the word *reconut* (at the rhyme), v. 6509) the meaning of God having died on the Cross on Good Friday, thus he is *worthy* (v. 6513) enough to receive communion on Easter Sunday. It is only now that Perceval has learnt this final lesson (that he must repent according to the

Hermit's advice) that he is ready to begin his actual story²⁴⁸, confirming that this *is* a *Bildungsroman* as was suggested by Jost's description of what it is that constitutes a *Bildungsroman*²⁴⁹. He has achieved all of those qualities and aspects of maturity required to now go and attain the Grail and complete his task, and were the tale not unfinished, one cannot help but assume that this is what he would have gone on to do.

Perceval's reactions to objects have clearly worked metonymically to represent the various stages in his personal development, such that we are able to understand what is needed for success to be possible in the ultimate task. It is not, as with Yvain and Erec, *courtly* and *emotional* maturity- these are only part of the whole. Rather one must also be in possession of a kind of perceptive or spiritual maturity if one is to be successful in the most important of all the knightly trials ever documented in literature. As Pickens suggests:

The Hermitage suggests a new beginning for the hero, but it is a reawakening that accounts for the entirety of his experience. [...] [It] is also a fulfilment of the potential in the hero's first awakening.²⁵⁰

What is meant here is that whilst what happens at the Hermitage is effectively the beginning of Perceval's real story, it is nevertheless also the culmination of all that has gone previously. However, without the scene with the Blood Drops, all which happens at the Hermitage could not occur, as it is the reverie that the Blood Drops inspire in Perceval that allows him to at last see beyond the superficialities with which he has been so preoccupied. It is undeniable that it is the turning point in the narrative supplied by the Blood Drops that allows Perceval receptivity to his final lesson. The Hermit's advice, otherwise, would probably have fallen, much as did the advice of the mother and the cousin etc., on deaf ears.

²⁴⁸ Maddox calls this scene Perceval's 'initiation', thus suggesting that this episode constitutes the beginning of Perceval's real adventure, *The Anterior Order*, p. 112.

²⁴⁹ 'Le *Bildungsroman* n'est [...] qu'une sorte de préroman, de préambule. En fait, à la fin de l'oeuvre le héros nous apparaît armé pour l'existence, prêt à vivre son roman.' See Jost, p. 99; (cf. my p. 5).

²⁵⁰ Pickens, *Le Conte du Graal*, p. 269.

In the scene with the Knights' Armour, what we have is the seed of that which is to grow throughout the romance and which will eventually bloom. Thus, Perceval is now set to fulfill that potential that began in the initial scene, as he has learnt and progressed to the point where he is spiritually mature and aware. If we cast our minds back to the first scene, Perceval was merely able to perceive the surface appearance of the knights' armour; he is now, having undergone a very specific process of perceptual maturation, able to look beyond that surface, as he does for the very first time with the Blood Drops. Thus, he may now also look *beyond the Grail*—to both *perceive* and to *understand* the true meaning of not only the object, but also the accompanying task that now lies before him.

In the wider scheme of things, the conclusion to this analysis suggests that, if a combination of Aristotelian, Augustinian, Bartholomaeian, Boethian and Avicennian theories of development and psychology can indeed be deemed the basis for the precepts and concepts of medieval psychology, then the greatly revered and widely cited Ariès must be thoroughly reconsidered and re-evaluated. And due to Ariès's vast number of advocates, it follows that a considerable amount of studies which include his work as the major source for information may, in fact, find themselves rather redundant in the light of my theory.

It cannot be denied that, if a storyteller of Chrétien's great reputation can be seen to have understood an altogether different view of childhood and personal development to that which, in the modern era, we have been led to ascribe to medieval man, thus there must surely be a resulting and potentially significant impact on the works of many other medieval authors. By applying the theory to other medieval stories and works, we may begin to see, and indeed find startling confirmation of, a new image of how childhood and psychological development was regarded in the Middle Ages. This, in turn, would lend a vital insight not only into the medieval psyche through a new elucidation of the many, thus far, insufficiently explained phenomena in certain medieval works, but also into the roots and understanding of our own, modern, versions of the developmental process.

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